SHORT STORIES

No. 788. Week Ending February 6, 1904. Price One Penny.

"MY LOVER!" SHE GASPED.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "A Thief in the Night." See inside.)

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Short Stories

No. 788.] [One Penny.

Week Ending February 6th, 1904.

A Thief in the Night.

Telling of a Case of Self-Sacrifice.

Containing the Incident depicted on the Cover.

"Do I love Cousin Gerald?"

Madge Hargraves was looking at her reflection in the mirror during the delicate process of setting that dainty hat on the well-poised head with its luxuriant growth of dark brown hair, when this thought flashed across her mind. A rich crimson wave swept quickly over the lovely face; it seemed like a wave of fire passing over it, so hot was it, and she retreated involuntarily from the mirror.

"Do I love Cousin Gerald?"

She sank into a chair and pressed her cool hands to her burning face, trying to hide herself from herself. The fleeting vision of her crimson face had imprinted itself on her brain with marvellous vividity and she could not shut it out.

Gradually her face became cooler and the rapid beating of her heart gradually steadied into the regular pulsation. She uncovered her face and stood once more before the mirror, surveying her reflection with a fixed gaze.

"Yes, I *do* love Cousin Gerald!" she murmured determinedly. "But does he love me?"

This last inquiry brought a troubled expression to the lovely countenance. For the past fortnight Gerald Hargraves had been in the old country house which was commonly designated "home" by three persons—Madge Hargraves, her cousin, and his father, Robert Hargraves. Madge had been left an orphan at an early age, and the custody of the child, with the care of the large estate to which she was heiress, was left to her father's brother, Robert Hargraves. The latter, with his son, had taken up his quarters in the old house and had ruled as master.

It had been a good thing for Robert Hargraves, for he was comparatively poor and had not had the same "luck" (as he termed it) as his elder brother.

The two children had grown up together for a few years, but as Gerald was five years older than Madge (her father having married later in life), the lad went away to school while she was still a small girl, and afterwards he went into the world to make his own way.

From one cause and another the cousins had not seen each other for five years, and that meeting had been, as events were proving, a fateful one. Madge had looked eagerly for Gerald's coming this time, but his behaviour had mystified and vexed her. At one time he would be all attention, as if—yes, she could say it now!—as if he loved her, and then he would change suddenly. It was through pondering over this fact while adjusting her hat that Madge had unconsciously asked herself the all-important question and had received her answer.

All-important question? Was it? Was it not equally important, perhaps more so, to inquire whether Gerald loved her or not? Madge felt her face grow as cold as it had become hot a few minutes earlier, and her lips trembled.

"Perhaps he has given his love to—to someone else!" she told herself, and the sun seemed to hide itself behind a cloud. "And perhaps I have unwittingly shown my own feelings to him."

It was humiliating and she felt inclined to take off her hat and plead a headache in order to avoid the promised walk with Gerald.

"That would be cowardly," she said, drawing herself up proudly. "The Hargraves are not cowards! Their history is full of heroic deeds and sacrifices; they have fought for their country, and they have suffered torture and death rather than betray a son or a father. And even in modern times their records are not void of instances of self-sacrifice."

Three minutes later she was on the lawn in the front of the house where Gerald was to await her. He was not there when she appeared, but she saw him approaching at a quick walk from the farther end of the mansion. How noble he looked! In Gerald Hargraves the girl saw all the noble qualities of the ancestors of whom she had been thinking, and it was with difficulty that she could repress the delight which his coming aroused within her.

"How I envy a man, whose privilege it is to show his affection while a woman must remain without emotion, though her heart be breaking, till the man she loves makes his——"

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Madge," cried the young man. "I fear that I am not the most punctual of mortals."

"It is my fault, Gerald. I must have taken longer than usual in putting my hat on."

"The result justifies the delay," he remarked, bowing gallantly. His eyes shone with such a light of admiration that Madge was forced to lower hers.

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"I think that this is a lovely day for a walk," returned Madge, uttering a commonplace to hide her pleasure at the compliment. "It is years since we went to the White House, and I shall be delighted to see the old place again, with all its associations of Charles I. and other well-known personages! Let us go at once and make up for lost time—my lost time," she added with a laugh.

"Which *I* have to help to make up," he remarked, his eyes twinkling. "Well, I am willing to do anything—for you."

Madge's heart beat violently against her side, but she was prevented from giving any reply by the arrival of a telegram, brought to him at that psychological moment by a footman. Gerald opened the envelope hastily and read the contents; he looked perplexed for a second, and then said abruptly: "There is no reply."

"Is there any bad news, Gerald?" she asked him anxiously, as the footman retired.

"No, Madge, not that I can understand," he replied somewhat absently. "I don't comprehend the message exactly, and I fancy it has reference to a letter which has been sent to me but which I have not received. Perhaps the letter will arrive by the evening post—got delayed somehow. Now, off we go!"

Madge perceived that her cousin was a little worried in spite of his attempt to appear gay, but the exhilaration of the walk and the companionship of a lovely, vivacious girl had their effect in time, and he chatted freely.

Madge Hargraves was delighted; it seemed that the old, vacillating behaviour of her cousin had disappeared, and her pulse quickened as the thought came to her that Gerald might take advantage of some shaded nook to declare his love.

She had heard and read how these critical moments come to some women, and she was as romantic as most of her sex; she longed for it with that curious, timid shrinking from the possibility of the realisation of that blissful moment for which she was, with human inconsistency, ardently awaiting.

And, as is so often the case, it came when least expected; and it terminated as she could not have anticipated.

She had ascended a low bank in order to obtain a view of the lower country that stretched away on the other side. "Oh, it is a splendid view, Gerald!" she called out, as she turned to look at him. To her surprise, he was gazing at the telegram with a white face and an anxious expression. At the sound of her voice he folded the paper and made as if to spring up the bank in order to stand by her side.

It all happened in an instant; in half turning, her foot slipped and she staggered and fell. Madge uttered a little cry as she felt herself going, but a second later she fell full into the open arms of Gerald, who clasped those arms about her.

She felt that there was a stronger pressure than even the exigencies of the case warranted, and her eyes lifted swiftly in order to look into his. Their faces were close; he bent slightly and kissed her passionately.

"Madge, Madge!" he cried hotly. "Oh, Madge! You are safe and in my arms, and I wish I could always have the right to hold you thus!"

Madge hid her face against his shoulder. All her doubts and fears had vanished; he loved her, and she was passing through that ecstatic time when a woman hears the declaration of love from him whom she loves and admires as the best and noblest of men.

And then came the bitterness of disappointment; in the midst of her ecstasy she was driven to the opposite emotion. Surely, but few women pass through such an experience.

Gerald stood her carefully on her feet and released her. His face was fully evidence of his agony.

"Forgive me, Madge. I ought not to have said it," he stammered. "I have no right to speak words of love to you."

The flush of shame mantled her cheeks; she was tortured by the remembrance that she had shown her sentiments plainly to Gerald, who was now disclaiming her, as it were.

"What do you mean?" she gasped, with trembling lips.

"Forgive me, Madge," he begged brokenly. "I have placed you in a false position, and I am to blame, but my love gained the mastery, and I forgot myself!"

"I do not understand it," she said dully, passing her hand over her eyes as if to clear away the obscuring mist. "That you love me, and yet——"

"I love you, but I cannot ask you to be my wife," he cried. "I have no right to do so. Nay, by every right I ought to go away and never see you again. Yes, I love you—how can I help it? But you must forget that and try to act as if I had never lived."

"How can I do that?" she burst forth passionately "You have won my heart and now you reject it. Oh, Gerald, to think that you, *you*, should have brought this humiliation upon me."

"No, no!" he shouted, raising his hand with the action of one who is warding off a blow. "I have been wrong; I cannot ask you to be my wife. I cannot explain; you must forget me. Oh, if I had not come."

"It would have been better for both of us." Almost as soon as the bitter words were uttered she regretted them. "No, Gerald, I am glad," she added, placing her hand on his arm and saying the words with ineffable sweetness. "You know that I love you, and a woman gives her *love* only once. Whatever happens, I shall love you. If you are in trouble, let me help you, Gerald. Yes," she urged, as he turned his head to hide his emotion. "Let me help you, Gerald, for the sake of old times, and—and the present."

He did not answer, and she continued:

"What is it, Gerald? It is"—she spoke fiercely as the thought came to her—"is it my money? Are you placing that as a barrier between us? You must not do it; I will give it all away rather than let it be an obstacle."

"That might have presented itself as an obstacle, Madge, had there not been others. No, I have not given myself to another woman. I am free, and I love you, but that must be the end of it. I cannot tell you more."

"Is it that telegram?" she persisted, with the tenacity of one who sees happiness just beyond her reach and is striving to grasp it.

"Partly," he said briefly. "I cannot tell you. You must think what you will of me."

"Let us go back now," she requested warily. "The sun has gone in; it is going to rain."

Yet the sun was still shining brilliantly, a fact which she noticed as they retraced their steps, but which she did not realise, so deep was the sorrow that filled her soul.

They parted in the wide hall; Madge went to her own room, and Gerald made his way to his father's study. The girl flung herself on a couch, and, burying her face in her hands as she lay flat on the piece of furniture, sobbed bitterly, her one thought being: "What parts Gerald from me?" If she could have witnessed the interview between father and son, which was taking place while she wept, she would have

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had the reply; but she knew nothing of it, she did not hear the father's parting words: "That is the last chance, and it is that or ruin!"

The cousins did not meet again that day, for Madge kept to her room on the plea of a severe headache. Heartache would have been a better description. On the following day they met just as Gerald was going out, and a formal "Good morning" was all that was said. Gerald avoided her gaze.

"I must try to get my colour back by this evening," Madge murmured, as she stole away to the picture gallery. This place had exerted a strange fascination over her of late. "The tenants are coming to-night for the annual rent dinner, and as I shall be the mistress on the next occasion when they pay their rent, I ought to be with them to-night."

She went into the gallery and passed an hour in studying the pictures of former Hargraves. There was one upon which her eyes rested longer than upon any other; it was the portrait of a young Hargraves who had taken the side of the Lancastrians against the Yorkists in the war of the Roses, and the record of him was that he had preferred death to the betrayal of his father.

"It is like Gerald," she mused, clasping her hands. "He looks brave and noble, and would be incapable of any mean or wicked action. So it would be with Gerald. Yes, I must trust him, and this mystery will be cleared one day."

She felt comforted, and left the gallery with a somewhat lighter heart than when she had entered it.

The rent dinner was one of those customs which are gradually dying out. The farmers and tenantry generally paid their rent once a year, after Michaelmas, and when the harvest was garnered or sold. The old-fashioned farmers put their money in the bank at the market town, but they seldom had a cheque-book. When they had a large bill to pay, they went to the bank, signed a form of withdrawal on the spot, and received the money wherewith to pay the debtor or his representative when necessary. When the rent was to be paid, these honest folk made a journey to the market town for the express purpose of drawing the £60, or £100, or £150 in notes or cash, instead of using the new method of handing over a cheque to the landlord. They had very little faith in cheques; notes and gold were what they recognised as valid, and it was usually gold.

The tenants trooped into the Hall and filed into the room where Mr. Hargraves sat in a big arm-chair at a table, and received their money, while Madge performed the task of entering the receipts in the cash-book. This was a new duty for her, and it was undertaken at the express wish of her uncle and guardian. After the payment of rent, the tenants made their way to the dining-rooms where their wives awaited them, and prepared to do ample justice to the good things which they knew awaited them.

Madge and her uncle remained behind in the apartment with the money. It was carefully placed in a strong cabinet which had been made on purpose for such occasions during her father's lifetime. It was strong inasmuch as the doors were of sheet iron incased in wood, and the sides and other parts of the cabinet were similarly constructed. The style of the cabinet was that of Louis Quinze, mingled with Buhl. It was scarcely a pure design of any period, and for that very reason it was an attractive article.

"I wonder how much money that cabinet has had within its doors since it was first placed here?" observed Mr. Hargraves, as he locked the door. "Now, my dear, make yourself pretty, and then come with me into the dining-room to do the duties of hostess."

"Make myself pretty?" echoed Madge, in laughing inquiry.

"Ah, that's where I made a mistake and betrayed that I am not a young man," laughed her uncle in reply. "I ought to have said, 'make yourself even prettier, if you can.' That's it."

"Do you think that the money is safe there, uncle?" asked the girl hesitatingly.

"Safe!" cried the old man, opening his eyes widely. "Why, no one but a timid girl would express the slightest doubt. You will learn, my dear, that the people of rural districts are honest. They do not lock, bolt, and bar their houses as town people do. At the seaside, do not the householders leave the doors open, although there may be thousands of town visitors in their borough? Nobody would attempt to rob us. And suppose that someone did make the attempt? This is an inner room, with little chance of being entered save through the door, and to reach that door the robber would have to pass through a large part of the house. Then, without the key, that cabinet wants some opening. No, you may rest easy. I wouldn't have thought of such a thing, and I declare you will make me nervous. Come!"

Feeling rather ashamed of herself, Madge ran to her room, performed a little act of embellishment here and there, and descended to the dining-room.

Gerald was there and he seemed to be in high spirits; this shocked Madge at first, but later on it stimulated her to fresh activity. The tenants and their wives were a good-natured, jolly class of people, and the evening was full of enjoyment for them. They trooped off merrily, with various presents for the children, who were not permitted to share the entertainment given to the elders.

Madge Hargraves felt worn out when she retired to her own room; her uncle had given her a glass of wine to assist in the process of inducing sleep, but instead of taking off the effects of over-fatigue it really excited her. She partly undressed, slipping on a dressing jacket, but she felt that it was useless to go to bed for a short time. She picked up a book and began to read, and the next thing that she remembered was awaking with a start to find that she had been dozing in the chair. It was two hours at least since she had retired.

It seemed more impossible than before to go to bed and rest; she felt nervous, excited, and paced the room uneasily. Suddenly the thought of the cabinet came to her, and she recollected, too, that she had heard half of a remark passed by one of the farmers as he had left the Hall. Some rough-looking fellow had been seen, so she now understood, not far from the Hall, and the farmer had congratulated himself that he had not met the fellow by himself or he (the farmer) might have lost his rent money! Suppose that man should have got into the house?

The dog would bark, she decided; and yet the man might be able to silence the animal. Madge could not rest; she must go downstairs to the apartment.

She descended the stairs noiselessly, if her uncle heard her, he would laugh immoderately in his good-humoured fashion. The dog? The creature was silent, somewhere. Was her surmise correct?

She reached the corridor and the door of the apartment, and her heart almost stopped beating as she gently tried the handle of the door and found that it yielded. She pushed it cautiously open.

There was a light in the room. She pushed the door open farther. The

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light showed her the figure of a man, who was trying to wrench open the doors of the cabinet with a crowbar.

He was dressed roughly, and the farmer's remark darted across her mind. Near him was a bag—a burglar with a burglar's outfit!

In her excitement Madge made a movement which caused the man to turn hastily. The light which illuminated his features also fell on hers, and there came into that man's countenance an expression that was something more than the fear of an ordinary housebreaker caught red-handed. Madge also felt that the face was not strange to her, although she could scarcely recall it for the moment, but in an instant the truth came despite her incredulity, and the name of her cousin came from her palsied lips in a low wail.

"Gerald! My lover!" she gasped.

She tottered into the room. Gerald Hargraves, for it was indeed he, rose and stood motionless before her; his garb was strange, his face even had been made up to some extent. A thief, caught in the very act!

"Gerald, oh, Gerald!" wailed the girl, pressing her hand to her heart as though she would prevent it from breaking. "Why did you do this? If you wanted money, why did you not ask me? But to do this—*this*, is too dreadful."

Gerald's face twitched with the intensity of the mental agony he was suffering, but he did not speak.

"You want money," she said feverishly. "You cannot get it like that. I have a duplicate key; I will get it."

She hurried from the room. Gerald remained motionless till he heard her coming again, when he aroused himself by a violent effort, picked up a bunch of keys that lay at the back of the bag, and dropped them into his pocket.

Madge ran into the room, opened the cabinet, and pointed to the gold that lay inside.

"Take what you want—it's mine!" she commanded. Her voice was hollow. "I will explain it all to uncle."

Gerald hesitated for a moment. "I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," he remarked with a hoarse, mirthless laugh, and he tumbled most of the money into the bag.

He dared not look at her; he picked up the bag, heavy with the weight of the ill-gotten gold, and passed out of the room. Madge stood like a statue, her unseeing eyes fixed on the door through which he had passed, and so she remained till Mr. Hargraves, pale as death, hurried in.

"Madge, my child, what is this?" he cried. "I could not sleep, and I fancied that I heard a noise. I hurried—I saw a light from this room in the corridor—I—Oh, Madge, what is it? Housebreakers?"

"It is nothing!" protested the girl, coming to herself. "I found him—I mean, I wanted the money. I would have done anything for Gerald. No, no, I don't know what I am talking about! I wish——"

And she fell into the old man's arms in a swoon.

It was twenty-four hours before Madge recovered consciousness, and it was nearly a fortnight before she could leave her bed. She had asked questions of the nurses, but they soothed her and said that she would know all in good time. Had they rightly understood, they would have told her sooner. She asked for her uncle, and they said that he was ill; she cried as she thought of the blow to the old man to learn that his son was—Oh, no, no! She could not bear it!

When she was seated in a chair, they said that someone wished to see her, and the good old country doctor told her gently that it was Gerald and that he had news for her. She braved herself to see him, and the doctor retired to a discreet distance, so that he might be out of hearing and yet within call if he were wanted.

Gerald came forward and knelt by her side. "Don't shrink from me, Madge!" he intreated. "It was not I who was the culprit, but the story is a shameful one for me to tell. Listen quietly while I tell it."

It was his father who was to blame; the old man, as trustee, had spent certain moneys belonging to Madge, and he was being dunned for another sum, hence the telegram. The only way out of the difficulty, and to avoid disgrace, was to steal some of the rent money and make certain marks that would indicate that a housebreaker had been at work. In that way the money would go into Mr. Hargraves' pocket and the guilt would be fixed upon some unknown person. The old man could not do it himself, he contended; it required a younger and more active man to buy the outfit, to make the marks on the doors of the cabinet, and generally to do all that was necessary to create an *alibi* and fix the guilt on the unknown. He asked Gerald to help, and so acted upon the young man's affection that, in order to spare him the disgrace, Gerald weakly consented to do it. He never intended to break open the cabinet; he had the keys ready.

"Can you forgive me, Madge? It was weak, but I did it for his sake, and I felt that I could afterwards return the money to you secretly. I was weak, but my punishment has been great! I have come to clear my character, for I can do so now, to all. My father is dead! The shock brought on a fit, from which he recovered shortly before his death, and in that conscious interval he insisted on making a full confession of having hired someone to rob the cabinet."

"Did he mention who it was?" asked Madge suddenly.

"No, and nobody knows save you and I now."

"I am glad for both our sakes," she murmured. "I am so sorry, but I forgive poor uncle. Let him rest. It was noble of you."

"I don't think so," he returned mournfully. "I was weak."

"You sacrificed yourself," she answered in her feeble voice.

"I am glad that you forgive me," he said quietly, a glad light shining in his eyes. "I can go away happy now."

"But *I* shall not be happy if you go away," she pleaded.

Their eyes met. She held out her hand, and he took it. And he was holding it an hour later, when the doctor protested that he really must interfere now, he couldn't allow it any longer.

Geo. Day.

A Twentieth Century Brigand.

In the Spanish mountains, beyond the reach of the arm of the law, there lives a brigand, Don Q. by name. Many tales—strange tales, blood-curdling tales—are told of him and of his doings.

Don Q. is not a petty pilferer. He holds captives to ransom, and it is his boast that, once he has fixed the sum, he never lets a prisoner go till it has been paid in full.

Patriotic to the backbone, Don Q. is capable of the deepest cunning. He never forgets an insult, never trusts a stranger, and rarely makes a friend. He will sacrifice a dozen lives without scruple if it be necessary to do so to secure a desired end, but on occasion he can be courtly and chivalrous. To do a woman in distress a service he is ever willing to risk his life.

A series of stories about this awe-inspiring person by K. and Hesketh Prichard is now appearing in *Pearson's Magazine*. In the February number the most exciting story yet published appears, entitled, "How Don Q. Paid for his Cigarettes." His method will be found very unusual.

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A Wandering Fortune.

The Tale of a Plucky Girl and an Honourable Man.

"Oh, of course! Everybody is down on me because I didn't choose to cringe to a capricious old grandfather. A girl mustn't show any independence of spirit nowadays," cried the girl vehemently, her lip curling scornfully as she surveyed her uncle and aunt.

"He was unjust all the way through. He wouldn't associate with his own daughter, my mother, because she married the man she loved; he was unjust to my father, because dad—dear old dad—was not rich; and he has been unjust to me, because he had me educated so as to become a worthy heiress to Lexworth Hall, and then he cuts me off!"

The girl's eyes were flashing, her bosom heaving; she had drawn herself up to the limit of her medium height, and her hands were tightly clenched.

Mrs. Warner, her father's sister, glanced at the girl and then at her own inferior half; Mr. Warner shuffled his feet uneasily and said nothing. Mrs. Wynne, the girl's mother, sat trembling in a corner; she was a timid little woman, quite the opposite of her daughter, and most people marvelled how such a weak, yielding creature could have so bold and outspoken a daughter.

"It's your own foolishness that has done it," cried Mrs. Warner, rather angrily. "You were the heiress to a magnificent property and a handsome rent-roll. You had the thing in your own hands. You knew that the old gentleman was a crotchety person, and all you had to do was to put up with his whims till it pleased Heaven to take him from this wicked world! Yet, what do you do? You contradict him and fly in the face of Fortune; he threatened more than once to cut you off, and this time he sent you home. You refused to give in or pretend to give in, and he is seized with a fit of apoplexy and dies. Unfortunately, he had altered his will, and the fit took him before he had time to repent, so here you are, almost penniless, when you could have avoided it all."

"I don't care," retorted the girl defiantly. "He was a tyrannical old man, who simply tried to force me to do things because he knew that I didn't want to do them. That was all. He wouldn't let anyone have a mind of her own; it must be just as he desired. And I couldn't yield to that. No man should have it in his power to act so arbitrarily. There wasn't one person who had pluck and independence enough to cross him, except me, and my nature couldn't stand it."

"See what your daughter has brought down on you, Dora," sneered Mrs. Warner, turning to her sister-in-law. "You began wrong, my foolish brother and you, when you named her Chris. It's a boy's name, and she has been a boy ever since in reality, and you two encouraged her. Well, who is to earn the living now? There is no more money coming. Will you do it?" she asked sarcastically, turning to Chris Wynne, who still retained her defiant attitude.

"Yes," declared the girl boldly. "I know what you are thinking about, aunt! Mother has been living with you, and has been able to pay her own expenses; but now you are afraid that you will be asked to keep her free of charge. Don't worry about that. We shall not stop here, and if we cannot earn a living, you will not have to support us. Do you know," she added, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, despite the gravity of the situation, "there is at least one thing we can do."

"What's that?" demanded Mrs. Warner sharply, falling into the trap.

"Starve, auntie, dear!" said Chris, with a demure air.

She bowed with mocking courtesy, but there was a world of determination underlying the words. Timid Mrs. Wynne rose and followed Chris out of the room, while Mrs. Warner sniffed contemptuously and tried to smother the uncomfortable feeling that had struck her somewhere in the region where most people keep a heart.

"And she'll do it rather than ask us for anything," ventured Mr. Warner uneasily. "Weren't you rather sharp, Louisa?"

"Don't talk nonsense!" snapped Louisa, trying to smother her own fears by answering shortly. "It's a great pity that she wasn't a boy. You see," she continued, telling him the story as if he were a stranger, "Mr. Lexmore was as irascible as you can imagine; he was angry because he had no son, and he crushed the spirit out of his wife and daughter. I'd like to see the man who would do that to *me!*"

"Exactly, my dear," ventured Mr. Warner again. "Then why are you so down on Chris?"

"Don't interrupt with foolish remarks," said Mrs. Warner, glaring at him. "You don't understand. Well, when his daughter grew up, he determined that she should marry a title, and she went and fell in love with my brother and plucked up just enough spirit to defy the old man in that way. I am not surprised, for my brother was as handsome and lovable a man as I have ever seen.

"Old Lexmore was furious and cut her off, but when he found that there was a probability of his having a grandson, he came round sufficiently to see his daughter and make promises. Then another disappointment fell on him; the child wasn't a boy, but that girl who has just gone out of this very room. Old Lexmore was furious and wouldn't have anything more to do with them.

"They decided to name her Chris; that was because her grandfather's name was Christopher, and there is a girl's name Christine, and both are often called Chris for short. So they had her christened just 'Chris,' and they seemed to delight in developing her independent nature and her boyishness.

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"And then, one day, old Lexmore nearly ran his horse over a girl of six. He growled at her that she should have got out of the way, and the little girl looked fearlessly at him, and boldly told him that he had no right to ride his horse just how and where he liked, and that she would call a policeman.

"The child's behaviour touched his flinty heart in some unaccountable manner; he asked her name, found out that it was his own grandchild, and finally took her in hand, thinking that she would carry out his wishes, if her mother didn't. He wouldn't see the mother or father, and they gave up the little one for her own welfare.

"And so it went on. They often quarrelled as she grew up, but it always ended all right. I am sure that it was a good thing for Dora after my brother died. But this time things went farther than usual, and that unfortunate attack of apoplexy spoilt everything. The old gentleman altered his will, leaving everything to a son of an old college friend, although he hadn't seen that friend for years. And Chris has the mortification of knowing that by her foolishness she had rendered her mother and herself penniless.

"She doesn't care, she says. Well, she will learn to care. She should have given way and been all humility, and cringed to him, as she calls it. Isn't the fortune worth all that? Confound the man!" she continued, looking up; "if he hasn't gone and left me talking to the air!"

It was perfectly true; her husband had heard the story so many times that he was tired of it, and had slipped out unobserved.

In another room of the same house, Chris Wynne and her mother were talking gravely. The girl had her arm round her mother's waist, as if to protect her, and the elder woman was glad to lean, figuratively, on her tomboy of a daughter.

"I don't blame you at all, my dear," said Mrs. Wynne, in answer to a question from Chris. "If you don't wish to do a thing, say so, and don't be hypocritical. Be as true as your father was, Chris, dear, and you will find me quite ready to bear the consequences. My father's action was unjust, but we must not judge others too severely, Chris, as we hope for mercy ourselves. Let us try to forget the past, or the disagreeable part of it, and think of the future."

Chris kissed the sweet-tempered, meek little woman lovingly.

"I am not so much concerned about the future, mother," she said. "When I was in London three years ago, with grandfather's cousin, Lady Hartfield, she warned me that something like this might happen, and said that she would help me, if I wanted help. She is poor, as peeresses go, and, what is more, I wouldn't impose on her good nature; but she can assist me materially in getting a post as companion. I am more fitted for that than anything. So I can earn enough to keep us both."

"But——" began Mrs. Wynne, and then her remonstrance was cut short by a kiss.

That very evening Chris wrote to Lady Hartfield, and she went to bed to dream many things, prominent among which was the brief love affair of that London visit three years ago. What had become of Captain Hamilton? She had never heard of him since then. She told herself that she had not loved him, and yet why was it that life had not been so bright during those past three years, and why did she have that strange pain at her heart sometimes? She awoke at that juncture and was angry with herself when she found that her eyes were wet with tears.

Chris had to wait more than a week for a reply, and then she found that Lady Hartfield was in Switzerland; however, she was able to say that she had recommended Chris to a wealthy lady who was just returning to England. An appointment was arranged, and in less than a month Chris had entered upon her duties, and her mother was comfortably lodged in rooms away from her sister-in-law.

Chris Wynne had an agreeable position with Lady Braxton, who, growing to like the girl, treated her more as a daughter than as a paid companion. Lady Braxton lived a retired life, generally speaking, travelling a great deal, and usually seeking places where the majority of wealthy people did not go. As the months passed, and winter came and went, she began to think that it might, after all, do her good to see a little more society, and that it would be better for her companion.

"She is a dear girl," she mused one day; "high-spirited and beautiful. She bears the loss of that money with great bravery, and I am becoming really fond of her. I'll go about a little more in Society."

She was as good as her word, and thus it came about that, during the approaching summer, she accepted an invitation to spend a few weeks at Gorseton Park, the residence of an old friend, and Chris went with her.

There was a houseful of guests, among whom were several young ladies, and there was a constant round of visits. There were several good families in the district, each having its numerous visitors, and the exchange of courtesies and invitations was continual. Owing to Lady Braxton's influence, Chris was well treated everywhere and by all except a very punctilious or snobbish person here and there, so that she was spared the common experience of being constantly reminded that she was "only a companion." Life was bright, and Chris was happy, except on infrequent occasions, when the haunting memory of three years ago came back with special vividness.

Chris was seated in a window, behind a loose curtain, reading Tennyson, one lovely morning about a week after their arrival at Gorseton Park. She was deep in "The Princess," when her attention was distracted by the abrupt entrance into the room of Miss Bertha Ross, whose none-too-musical voice made itself heard and felt—as another guest unkindly expressed it—as soon as she was well inside.

"I say, have you heard? There's a party coming over this afternoon from the Manor, and I understand that Captain Hamilton is one of the guests. You remember him, Bella, don't you? Oh, ever so handsome! He has been away for a long time—should say it was close on three years, in India, so they tell me, fighting the border tribes. What a nuisance those tribes always are, whether in India or elsewhere. Well," she rattled on volubly, "Captain Hamilton is there, and he has expressed his determination to run over here. He knows Sir Richard Gorseton, it seems. Now, ladies,—unmarried ladies, I refer to—here is a chance for you. Young, handsome, rich, noble, and a bachelor!"

Some of the ladies laughed; the others did not look approvingly on Miss Ross' conduct. There was a general chatter among the various groups, to one of which Miss Ross attached herself, and Captain Hamilton was forgotten by all save one. Chris had felt her cheeks burn at the remarks of Miss Ross, and Tennyson had no more attraction.

Captain Hamilton was coming! Chris turned hot and cold alternately. The incidents of three years before came back to her with affrighting vividness, and she placed her hand over her heart as if to steady its tumultuous beating. She sank back on the couch and closed her eyes.

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Captain Hamilton had told her that he loved her; she had accepted his love and had said that she loved him. And then—ah me!—her happiness had turned her brain, it must have been so! She had been so excited and so glad, but her old independence had gained the upper hand and she had resented his natural, lover-like objection to her accepting so much attention from others. Yet he was right to an extent, she admitted it now; where he erred was in attaching so much importance to the acts of a high-spirited girl.

To punish him, she had flirted violently with another man; she had grown reckless and had carried the flirtation to the extent of giving him every waltz on her card on that fateful evening, almost ignoring her lover. She had retired with Arthur Macey to an alcove after the last dance but one of the evening, and there Captain Hamilton had found them, just as Chris was pinning a flower into Macey's coat.

Hamilton, in his mad rage, had not noticed the expression of regret and fear on Chris' face as she listened to the mad outpourings of this man whom she had so thoughtlessly and so unintentionally encouraged. He saw only the scene, and, with words of scorn, he had turned on his heel and left them. Chris had not seen him since.

Lost in her reverie, Chris was aroused by an increase of the clamour of conversation in the room from which she was screened by the gauzy curtain. She sat upright and then bent deeply forward over her book. Someone had entered the room with Sir Richard and Lady Gorseton, and that someone was being introduced as "Captain Hamilton"!

He knew some of the guests, so that the necessary introductions were soon over. Captain Hamilton had walked over, hoping to catch the male guests most of whom were out, however.

Poor Chris did not dare to look up; she waited in agony for someone to call her and introduce her, but Miss Bertha Ross, who had taken the task of introduction upon herself, as an old acquaintance of Captain Hamilton, ignored "the companion." She was no friend of Miss Wynne! At first Chris did not realise that she was to be passed over, but when Hamilton sat down and began to talk, the truth burst upon her. The bitterness of her position stung her. Of course, she was not entitled to the honour of an introduction; she was only a hired companion!

A moment before, Chris was hoping that something would happen to prevent her from being brought face to face with Captain Hamilton, and now that the wish had been realised, she was angry. She shut her eyes to prevent the tears of mortification from welling to the surface, then she rose quietly and passed out through the open window.

Captain Hamilton had seen the figure behind the curtain and had wondered who it was. It struck him that there was something familiar about the poise of the head. He kept a look-out from the corner of his eye, and when the form rose to its full height and passed out of sight through the window, he started.

During the rest of that brief visit, Captain Hamilton was a little absent-minded, and he breathed a sigh of relief when he had said "Good-bye." He looked about for Chris; he knew it was she; but he could see no trace of her.

How terribly unhappy Chris was all that day! She complained of a headache in the afternoon, and kindly Lady Braxton ordered her off to bed. She did not know whether Hamilton came again in the afternoon or not; she only knew that she was miserable with the double experience of that morning, and she wondered how she could avoid him in future.

"He will triumph over me politely!" she cried. "It will be his revenge for three years ago, and I am now altogether beneath him in social standing!"

There Captain Hamilton found them, as his betrothed was pinning a flower into Arthur Macey's coat.

Her heart told her that she was wronging the man, but another paroxysm of perversity had taken possession of her, and she refused to listen.

In the morning a change came. Chris had regained her usual equanimity and was prepared to meet Hamilton with perfect self-possession, but that was not all. A letter was brought to her, the envelope of which bore the die of the solicitor who had conducted all her grandfather's business, and that letter contained the most startling news. She had to read it three times before she could properly grasp the contents.

Her grandfather's property had been left to Mr. Geoffry Boyd; this gentleman had been away, but now that he was back again, he had declined to accept benefit from an act of injustice; he had enough money of his own, and did not want that which belonged of right to Miss Wynne. With sublime ignorance of legal formalities, he had instructed the solicitor to tear the will up and so undo the wrong; and on being informed that this could not be done, he had ordered the solicitor to prepare the necessary documents for signature in order that he might make the property over to Miss Wynne!

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Then she was an heiress again? An heiress in spite of herself, it seemed! Who was this Mr. Boyd and how could she thank him? But ought she to accept the gift?

The news of this romantic turn of affairs created a sensation at Gorseton Park, and the two or three persons who had snubbed her now declared that she was indeed a charming girl. Chris had become attached to Lady Braxton, and decided to stay with her for a time. The Gorsetons made her very welcome, and the future seemed very bright once more for Chris. That was what outsiders thought, but the brightness was marred for Chris by a cloud that would not vanish.

If Chris had had to attend to the formalities, she would have been busy, but the solicitor attended to all and came down to Gorseton Park when it was necessary to consult her or to get her signature. She had such confidence in the elderly gentleman, who was so extremely delighted at her good luck, that she did not trouble to read the documents and contented herself with adding her bold, flowing signature to such papers as were presented to her.

Only one thing puzzled and vexed her; Mr. Boyd did not wish her to write and thank him. He seemed to be a gruff sort of a man to do things in so off-handish a style. So Chris had to transmit her expression of gratitude through the lawyer.

It was a fortnight later when she saw Captain Hamilton again; he came unexpectedly to her side while she was walking in a secluded part of the grounds of Gorseton.

"Pardon my intrusion on your privacy, Miss Wynne!" he said politely. "I could not resist the temptation of renewing our acquaintance, of making an apology, and of conveying my congratulations! I was not aware that you were at Gorseton Park till—till after you had vanished through the window. And I am glad indeed to learn that an act of injustice has been rectified."

"Thank you!" she said frigidly. "It is very good of you. I hope you are quite well?"

She could have bitten her tongue the next moment for this cold speech. Hamilton paled slightly under his bronze, but he answered with perfect equanimity:

"I am quite well, thank you, Miss Wynne. Are you walking about the grounds? May I come, too, and enjoy the pleasure of a chat?"

"I am sorry, but I am going in now." Why would this perverse spirit gain the upper hand and make her say things which she regretted immediately? "I expect you will find more agreeable company, Captain Hamilton!"

And with a cold bow she left him. In the house she found the solicitor awaiting her; there was a document to sign and some instructions to be obtained.

"I think that will be the last thing to be done in order to complete the transfer of the estate, the stocks, and the money from Captain Hamilton to you, Miss Wynne," observed the solicitor absently, as he searched among his papers for one that he missed. "What has become of it now?" he continued, puckering his brows. "Oh, here it——"

"Who did you say was transferring this property to me?" interrupted Chris in a strange voice. "Captain Hamilton?"

"Eh? Er, bless my soul!" gasped the elderly gentleman in his vexation. "Oh, dear, he *will* be cross! He has been most particular that you should not know! However came I to be so foolish as to betray the secret?"

"Please explain this to me, Mr. Gower!" said Chris peremptorily. "You ought not to have kept me in ignorance of it. How was it I did not see his name on the documents? Why has he been called Boyd?"

In a great state of agitation, Mr. Gower explained. Hamilton's name was originally Boyd, but he had inherited a fortune from his mother's brother, who had stipulated that he should take *his* name of Hamilton, so the nephew was now Captain Geoffry Boyd Hamilton. (Chris remembered now that the first name was the same, which had not occurred to her previously.) Hamilton had made the property over to her. Chris had not troubled to read the documents, and, where it had been necessary for both to sign, Hamilton had taken care that she should sign first. Old Lexworth had not heard that this young man had changed his name, so he had called him Boyd in his will.

Chris was consumed with remorse; how good, how noble he had been, and how shamefully she had treated him. She left the solicitor abruptly and hurried out in search of Geoffry. She saw him and hastened after him; and it was not till she had caught him up and stood facing him, her cheeks aglow, her breath coming quickly and making an irresistible picture, that she realised exactly what she had done. She was throwing herself at this man!

"Well?" he inquired, fixing his keen eye upon her. "Have you decided that I cannot find better company? I cannot, that's a fact!"

"Oh, why did you do it?" she burst out. "I don't know how to thank you—I—oh, I believe I shall hate you, there!"

"And as for me," he said deliberately, restraining himself only by a great effort, "I am certain that I shall love you more every day. Oh, Chris!" It sounded like a wail. "Have these three years tortured you as they have me?"

She tried to withstand his piercing gaze, but her eyes drooped; in a moment he had sprung forward and was clasping her convulsively to his breast.

"I'll never let you go again!" he said with fierce earnestness. "And I won't let you get away from my grasp till you name the wedding day. No! I don't care who is coming. I'll hold you till you name it."

"Next year, then," she cried, trying to escape, so that her blushes might not be seen.

"Next fiddlesticks," he cried. "I say the end of next month; that's time enough for you to get ready and I won't wait another minute!"

And she had to consent.

F. Brewster.

To Those About to Marry.

Don't let the knot be tied without knowing something about the character and disposition of each other. This you can find out by sending a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. In return an accurate delineation of your character will be sent. If you both obtain these delineations, and then compare them, you will be able to decide whether a happy marriage is likely to result.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIES. **BEGIN READING TO-DAY.**

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

SYNOPSIS.

Vivienne D'Alton, who in this series tells the story of a certain period of her life, is a young lady who has been educated in Germany.

Until the time when the story commences, she has never seen her father since he placed her at the school in Bochum.

Her mother is dead, and she has no brother or sister. Hence, she seems quite alone in the world.

But one day her father sends a message to the school that he wishes his daughter to leave and to meet him at Rotterdam.

The person who announces himself as her father at Rotterdam is not in the least like the handsome gentleman she had pictured to herself, but is short and stout.

They drive to a large mansion, where Vivienne is enthusiastically welcomed by a Mrs. Sherwood, "a bosom friend of her mother," who requests Vivienne to call her "aunt."

Vivienne takes an instantaneous dislike to "Aunt Flora."

A Mr. Gilbert Graysworthy comes to dine at the house, and incidentally mentions that round his waist he carries a belt containing fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds.

A day or two later Vivienne is shocked to learn that Gilbert Graysworthy has been found murdered in the street! There seems no motive for the crime, for his money, his watch and chain are still upon his body.

On the passage across to England Vivienne sees a person whom she believes is Annchen, a maid whom she greatly dislikes, talking to a man whom she has seen before under very suspicious circumstances.

She also meets a Viscount Broomville, a fellow-passenger, who announces that he is going to call upon Mr. Beverley D'Alton regarding some business affairs.

He does so, and relates how he was attacked in Rotterdam by persons whose evident intention was to rob him of the diamonds he carried about with him.

Some days later, Vivienne takes a surreptitious walk in the evening. She is amazed to see Viscount Broomville shadowed by the two birds of evil omen she had seen on the Harwich boat. The man is about to strike the Viscount when Vivienne utters a timely shriek of warning and thereby saves the Viscount from being murdered.

Vivienne's *début* into Society is a phenomenal success, as at a reception given by the D'Altons many of the aristocracy are present.

A young gentleman named Alan Melrose, with his two sisters, visits the D'Altons. This youth announces his intention of investing £80,000 in the New Barbary Land Development Co. While he and his host are discussing financial matters, Miss Helena D'Alton is announced as wishing to see Vivienne.

Mr. D'Alton's face turns to a ghastly hue, and he hurriedly shows Alan Melrose out of the room.

Miss Helena D'Alton tells Vivienne that she was her mother's godmother, and that she has never heard of "Aunt Flora."

FIFTH EPISODE.

Fraud and Ingratitude.

I saw neither Mrs. Sherwood nor my father until we met at breakfast next morning, and a glance at the latter showed me that he was certainly far from well, for his face was pale, his eyes were bloodshot, and his appetite was *nil*.

Nor was "Aunt Flora" in much better case. But with unusual unselfishness, she insisted that her haggard appearance was merely the result of last night's headache, and concentrated her attention upon "Dear Beverley's evident indisposition."

"You really must see a doctor to-day," she said. "Such an attack as you had last night must not be permitted to occur again."

"It will not occur again, take my word for it," was the reply. "I will go to a specialist to-day, and it will be strange if he cannot devise an effectual cure."

Fräulein used sometimes to tell her pupils that the exercise of strong will would, in many cases, cure us of all sorts of ideas concerning one's feeble health, and I thought of her when I heard my father assert that his heart attacks would not be allowed to trouble him again.

But there was a peculiarity in his facial expression, and a significance in the tone of his voice which struck me as rather remarkable, for it was as though he were speaking of a person, instead of alluding to a form of illness.

However, the fancy was but momentary, and was banished by my own anxiety, for I had seen for myself that my father was certainly ill on the previous evening. So I said solicitously: "Father, if you can really have yourself cured, pray do it at once, before your condition becomes worse! You looked absolutely ghastly last night, just after Miss D'Alton came to see us."

"Miss D'Alton!" echoed Lady Windelmere. "Is she a relation?"

"She is my father's aunt," I was explaining, when Mrs. Sherwood hastily interrupted me.

"She is nothing of the sort," she said. "She is a vile impostor, who has already swindled no end of people on the strength of her relationship to the great millionaire, Mr. Beverley D'Alton."

"And," added my father, "I am afraid that, if she ventures to show her face here again, I shall be compelled to hand her over to the police."

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"But," I protested, greatly distressed at hearing all this, "she knew my mother! She was her godmother, and seemed to know all about us."

"Not all," was the reply, given with one of my father's deprecatory smiles. "What she does know could be easily learnt by anybody taking the trouble to inquire. The real Helena D'Alton died several years ago, and the fact that I was lying ill with rheumatic fever, and therefore unable to attend the funeral, put it into the head of her companion, Florence Grantham, to try and personate her, in order to enjoy the annuity which I allowed my aunt. In this fraud the woman was helped by her cousin, who acted at the time as my solicitor, and it was actually successful until I met the vicar of our family church when he was taking a flying holiday through Italy. He assured me that my aunt, the last of her generation, was really dead, and he gave me such information as made me stop the annuity, and change my lawyers forthwith."

I was dreadfully disappointed, for I had taken a great fancy to the old lady, and I was quite able to second his opinion when my father continued:

"Unfortunately, the old impostor is possessed of most fascinating manners and appearance, so that she easily imposes upon people. But as soon as ever they begin to question her deeply, she flounders in a maze of inaccuracies, for she knows absolutely nothing of my early youth, except that the Beverleys and the Collingwoods lived on neighbouring estates. Indeed, I doubt whether she ever heard even of your mother's inseparable school-friend, Flora, for she had only lived a short time with my Aunt Helena."

"Oh, well, don't bother any more about the stupid old woman now," interrupted Mrs. Sherwood. "I don't suppose she wheedled anything out of Vivienne, and——"

"She never attempted to wheedle anything out of me."

"Perhaps not. That was only because she was short of time. Very likely her principal object was to be observed coming here, and I think you may take it for granted that you have seen the last of her. Beverley, you will not delay about going to that specialist?"

"Certainly not," was the prompt response. "I shall go now, and the whole business will be settled in a few hours. By-the-bye, Vivienne, I think your friend, Viscount Broomville, has behaved very shabbily to me."

I felt my face flush scarlet at this speech, and said hastily: "Oh, father, I hope not! He seemed to be such a perfect gentleman."

"Just so, my dear. But it doesn't do to trust to appearances; not in this case, at all events."

"But what has Lord Broomville done that he can be called 'shabby'?"

"He has served me a very nasty business trick. After inducing me to go out of my way to afford him a good investment, he has broken my confidence, and turned his shares over, at a big profit, to a third party, in whom I take not the slightest interest."

"But isn't that the essence of smart business?"

"It is. But I didn't think that it would be brought into play here. As I have observed already, I expected my confidence to be kept sacred until I gave the word to let others into the secret of the great scoop I looked forward to. By withdrawing his money almost as soon as he had invested it, and by selling his shares to somebody else, Lord Broomville has broken the law of commercial integrity, and his premature action will very likely cost me half a million."

I was glad that Lady Windelmere had excused herself, and gone to her own room before this conversation took place, for I felt as humiliated by it as if I myself had been guilty of the breach of trust of which the Viscount was accused. Of course I did not know much about the flotation of shares. But I had it from his lordship's own lips that he had invested his money in the New Barbary Land Development Company, and even I realised that it was not nice for him to have behaved as he had done, especially after the great service I had been able to render him.

"Perhaps," I faltered, "he will have a good explanation to give you when he calls again."

"My dear child, if there is one thing upon which you can feel sure, it is that Lord Broomville will do all in his power to avoid meeting us again. If he were an old hand he would brazen it out. But, being a fresh recruit to the ranks of chiselers, he still has a bit of conscience left, and won't show up till he's forced."

So my ideal of noble manhood had proved himself as fictitious in value as had the sweet-looking old lady whom I would so gladly have welcomed as an aunt. Of course my father could not be mistaken. But my disappointment was none the less bitter on that account, and as soon as I could reach the seclusion of my own rooms, I indulged in the first fit of weeping I had felt the need of since the terrible fate of Mr. Graysworthy first brought me face to face with life's tragedies.

* * * * * *

"Vivienne, you have made another conquest. Mr. O'Connell is wildly in love with you."

"Oh, Aunt Flora, how can you say such a preposterous thing? Mr. O'Connell is old enough to be my father."

"Which means that he is in the very prime of life and vigour."

"Yes, he is like a prime ox at Christmas."

"I don't suppose he can help being so stout."

"Oh, yes, he can. He should eat less, and exercise more. Then he would be more presentable."

"There is no need for him to worry about being presentable. He has money enough to outweigh all other disadvantages."

"Money doesn't make up for his pronounced vulgarity. And I must confess that I think more of good family than I do of wealth."

"What better family could you have than the O'Connell's? All Ireland thinks well of them and their doughty deeds and speeches."

"Then they must have spoken very differently from your friend, who has certainly learnt his Irish accent on the Continent."

"His father had a very good appointment in Berlin, and the children naturally acquired a German accent."

"I was brought up in Germany, too, but my English was too well looked after to permit me to forget my native tongue."

"Upon my word, you would try the patience of a saint."

"If ever I meet one, I shall try what I can do in that direction. Meanwhile, be good enough to remember that I consider it no compliment for a man like Mr. Emil O'Connell to gaze covetously at me."

"In other words, miss, you are off your head with vanity and flattery. But be good enough to remember, in your turn, that Mr. O'Connell is a man whom lots of your superiors would be glad of."

"Very likely. There's yourself, for instance. I don't suppose he would come amiss to you, and I should be very pleased to see you provided with another husband."

By this time, Mrs. Sherwood ought to have known that she was no match for me in an argument, and I ought to have known that it was dangerous to provoke the antagonism of a woman whom I credited with many malignant qualities.

But there was one thing which was already impressed

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upon me too unpleasantly to be forgotten, and that was the security of Mrs. Sherwood's influence over my father. Nothing could shake that. And though all my wishes in other respects were granted, I knew that so long as I remained unmarried I should have to endure the daily companionship of a woman whom I almost hated, as well as that of the maid who was on such strangely intimate terms with both her employer and his lady friend.

But I could see no reason why I should endure the attentions of Mr. O'Connell, until my irate parent, prompted by Mrs. Sherwood, told me plainly that I must treat the man as smilingly and as courteously as I would treat a younger and handsomer man.

"Whether you are inclined to marry him or not," he continued, "I insist that you neither say nor do anything to lessen his pleasure in coming here."

"You surely wouldn't expect me to marry a man like that, even if he were richer than yourself?"

"Of course not. I have far higher views for you. But there is no need to hurry over finding a titled husband for you. Enjoy yourself to the full, my dear. But, remember, you are to do me a great service in return for all I do for you."

"Nothing will delight me more! What is the service to consist of?"

"Civility to my friends and obedience to my wishes. Surely that is little enough to ask of you?"

With these words my father left us, and the sneering smile bent upon me by Mrs. Sherwood was the outward indication of her triumph, for both she and I knew that she was one of the people to whom I was ordered to be civil.

Some days passed by, and my father's prophecies proved correct, for neither Miss D'Alton nor Viscount Broomville came to see us again, and I was forced to the conclusion that I had been woefully mistaken in my estimate of their characters.

This conviction helped to reduce me to a more subdued frame of mind, and Mr. Emil O'Connell found me so outwardly tolerant of his unwelcome attentions that they became alarmingly demonstrative of his desire to honour me with a proposal.

"Vivienne," said my father just as I was about to go out for a drive with Lady Windelmore, "I want you to be very careful in your treatment of Mr. O'Connell to-night."

"Oh, father," I remonstrated, "I positively loathe the man! And if you strain my obedience too far, I'm afraid I shall shock both him and you!"

"It won't be much of a strain to prevent him having a chance of proposing to you this evening, will it?"

"Oh, no!" was my delighted answer. "I shall be only too glad to circumvent such a proceeding!"

"Very well. Your best plan will be to absent yourself to-night. Plead a headache, or whatever you like. He is going to dine with us, But if you keep out of sight, I will give him his *congé*, and I don't think he will want to visit here again."

I was very thankful to fall in with my father's views, although I was rather amazed at his sudden change of front. However, there was always something strange cropping up, as there probably is in every phase of life, and I soon forgot all about Mr. O'Connell in the pleasure of the undoubted sensation which reigned amongst the onlookers as our splendid equipage drove round and round the Park.

Presently, Lady Windelmore expressed a wish to call at a big jeweller's shop in Bond Street, where she was having some old jewels reset, and the coachman turned the horses' heads eastwards. Of course I already possessed numerous pieces of beautiful jewellery, but I was none the less interested in the display which greeted my eyes in the Bond Street shop, and I took the opportunity of ordering one or two articles to be sent home to me.

"What a magnificent parure!" exclaimed Lady Windelmore suddenly, as she stopped in front of a heavy, padlocked case, which was used to display a suite of the most wonderful diamonds I had ever seen.

Seeing how we both admired them, the jeweller volunteered a little information.

"Such suites as this," he said, gazing at the glorious gems with pardonable pride, "such suites as this have a very limited chance of purchase, and are rarely made except to order, for only royalties or millionaires can indulge in them. This set is intended for the Empress of Russia, and will be handed over to the Tsar's envoy this very afternoon. Oddly enough, Mr. Emil O'Connell, a gentleman who made a terrific lot of money in Westralia, saw one or two of the pieces, and ordered a duplicate set exactly like this, including tiara, necklace, pendant, brooch, stomacher, bracelet, and a wonderful single-stone finger ring. He has paid a fabulous price for them, and fetched them only a few minutes before you arrived."

I couldn't help being interested to hear of Mr. O'Connell's magnificent purchase, especially as I had more than a suspicion that the costly adornments were intended for me. But I did not hint this suspicion, even to Lady Windelmore. In fact, I had not mentioned my obnoxious suitor to her that day for several reasons, and I was glad that she had to go out later to a dinner-party to which she had accepted an invitation, as she was thus not likely to notice what happened at our house when the poor man received his *congé*.

I should also be free to do almost as I liked, for, with the approval of her ladyship, I had declined the invitation to accompany her, on the plea that there would be no youthful guests to lend congenial brightness to the affair.

"I'll have quite a nice evening to myself!" I thought, after I was once more in my own boudoir. "Her ladyship has gone out, and both father and Aunt Flora will be occupied with Mr. O'Connell. I have a good mind to have a tray brought up here, and then I will dismiss both Susan and Annchen till eleven o'clock. Nobody will take any notice of me

A Reduced Facsimile of Next Week's Cover.

A Dramatic Episode from a Splendid Story which will appear in the Valentine Number, published next week.

for hours, and I can have another little constitutional, but I hope there won't be any mischief afloat, like there was the last time I went out alone."

This plan was duly carried out, and at half-past nine I was feeling happy and exhilarated at the prospect of indulging in what I considered a thoroughly innocent half hour's amusement, though I knew perfectly well that I was defying conventionality.

I enjoyed my solitary walk immensely, clad in the same old cloak and hat in which I left Bochum, for they were less conspicuous than the expensive things which had been lavished upon me ever since my father had sent for me.

On nearing our own house, at a few minutes past ten o'clock, I was dismayed to see two persons come into the light of the portico, and I instinctively stepped inside the gates of the adjoining house.

For the two gentlemen were my father and Mr. O'Connell, and I did not want either of them to see me. They came down the broad path together, and into the street. Both walked rather slowly, but I noticed that Mr. O'Connell's gait was extremely unsteady.

In fact, each step seemed to make him worse, and as I peeped through the trees, I could see that he began to lean heavily on my father's arm.

I was but a yard or two away from them, and could both hear and see what was going on without being observed myself.

"Come, come!" said my father. "Keep yourself straight, man."

"I don't know what has come over me," was the slow response. "I feel as if I were going to sleep."

"Well, you had better try to wake up. Ah, here comes a crawler. Let me help you in. Where shall I tell the man to drive to?"

"The Cecil. Tell the driver to hurry up. I feel half dead!"

It took a few minutes to get Mr. O'Connell into the cab, for by this time he was absolutely helpless. But the task was accomplished with the aid of the cabman, to whom my father tendered some money, saying in a loudish voice, apparently for the benefit of one or two people who lingered to see what was going on: "I'm afraid the gentleman has had a glass too much. The Cecil. Here's your fare."

Then, much to my amazement, he continued, in a much lower tone: "Lose no time. You'll find all serene at the office."

The cabman made no reply, but drove off with his insensible burden, and my father, with a curious chuckle, turned to go into the house again, leaving me thoroughly unnerved by what I had seen.

Perhaps some girls would not have been upset quite so much as I was at the sight of a drunken man being sent home alone in a cab. But I had seen very little of the seamy side of life, and I could not help connecting the degrading spectacle with myself.

I remembered that this man had probably allowed himself to be overcome by drink through disappointment, for my father had assured me that he meant to give him his *congé*. I also recollected that he probably carried a huge fortune, in the shape of a suite of diamonds, and though I did not like the man himself, I dreaded lest mischief should come to him through being left at the mercy of a strange cabman, who might, or who might not, be able to resist the temptation of rifling the pockets of his insensible fare.

I managed to reach my own room again without being noticed. But I felt strangely uneasy. My uneasiness was, however, destined to deepen into horror by the news that reached me next morning.

(*Another long instalment of this series will appear next week.*)

"I wish, sir, to ask for the hand of your daughter in marriage." "But are you in a position to support a family?" "Oh, I think so, sir!" "Yes; but you must consider the matter pretty carefully, for there are ten of us!"

Your Editor Chats.

Shortly to be Announced.

The time is now drawing near when I shall publish the full particulars of the new gigantic competition that I have in preparation for you. Before finally announcing the exact details of this novel scheme there is a terrible amount of work to be got through so as to be quite sure that there will be no hitch whatsoever in the working of it. I am pushing on as fast as ever I can with the final stages of this work, and at the very earliest moment the idea will be announced to readers of *Short Stories*. I cannot positively say when the announcement will be made, but at the most it will not be longer than two or three weeks, and possibly even before then. So, if you don't want to miss the chance of a lifetime, be quite sure to obtain next week's and the following issues. They will tell you more and more about the coming competition.

Next Week—Our Valentine Number.

Our next issue is the special Valentine Number. A reduced facsimile of the cover, which will be reproduced in colours, will be found on the previous page. The inscription to the picture, "He handed her the fateful valentine—the death-warrant of her happiness," is sufficient guarantee that the story it illustrates will be of enthralling interest. It will be written by one of the most popular authors of the day. Besides this story there will be many others of equal interest, in addition to our usual features. If you wish to send anyone a suitable valentine, you cannot do better than send them a copy of the Valentine Number of *Short Stories*.

A Guinea for a Reply.

"The Difficulty of Hugh Chester" is the title of the Eighth Unsolved Love Problem, which appears on pages 181 and 182. I will offer a guinea to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best advice to Hugh Chester under the circumstances. My decision as to the winner will be final. Replies must be written on one side of the paper only, and should not exceed one hundred words.

Replies should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Eighth Love Problem" marked in the top left-hand corner. The very latest date on which I can receive manuscripts is Friday, February 12th. None arriving after this date will be considered.

Competition Results.

I hope to announce next week the names of the winners in the Running Riddles Competition and of the Seventh Unsolved Love Problem.

Your Editor.

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REFUSED AND ACCEPTED.

The Tale of a Fortune Hunter.

"No, sir!"

That was what she said.

I rose up, trying desperately to appear unconcerned and careless. Pooh! It was of no use! Marjory Cheswick saw through me as if I had been a pair of spectacles. She knew that I would have sold myself for a postage-stamp just at that moment, and considered it a bargain. I got out of the room somehow, not in the most graceful style, I am afraid—and went home to ruminate on my dismissal.

"If Marjory Cheswick had not been an heiresss!"

That was the cry of my bruised heart during all the weary days and weeks that followed. Somehow I could not divest myself of the idea that Marjory had confounded me with the herd of fortune-hunters that had always surrounded her. There was no help for it now, however. Ah, *no* help for it!

"Charley's going thin—I hope he isn't going into a decline," said my mother dubiously, shaking her head. "I wish he'd consent to a tablespoonful of cod-liver oil morning and night."

"Hang cod-liver oil!" said my father, adjusting his glasses magisterially. "Charley only needs a little change. What do you say to a run on the Continent, my boy, eh?"

"Indeed, dad, I don't need any relaxation. I would rather remain quietly at home."

My father looked at me keenly. He was a man who never changed his mind; and the upshot of the matter was that on the Continent I went. An only son is always more or less spoilt, and I belong to the class of *more* spoilt.

Cod-liver oil! Foreign travel! What good would they effect so long as I couldn't take a tablespoonful of Marjory Cheswick twice a day, nor carry her across the Channel with me?

Once away from home I extended my route of travel considerably, and two years crept away almost before I knew it. I had not forgotten Marjory Cheswick, and the silvery "No, sir!" was as plainly imprinted on my memory as if it had been spoken yesterday.

"Cheswick! Cheswick!" People had almost forgotten the very name in the fashionable circles whose star Marjory had once been, when I returned to my native land.

"Cheswick!" said Uncle Brownson, who knew everybody and went everywhere. "The fat old man with a daughter who had property and flirted a good deal, hey? Heard he was dead; s'pose the daughter's married and gone."

"Married and gone!" I should have liked to have knocked off Uncle Brownson's rusty old wig; but, after all, the old man wasn't to blame.

I was strolling one evening through one of the principal streets leading out of the City, when I paused a moment at a brilliantly lighted corner, where three golden balls hung over my head. There was a dead-lock among cart-wheels and screaming drivers, and I mechanically turned to look at the display in the pawnbroker's window.

Surely I could not be mistaken! I rubbed the raindrops off my eyelashes, and looked again. No—I was *not* mistaken.

There, among battered violins, paste diamonds, and all the incongruous medley that collects in such places, hung a green-plumed canary, straining his small throat in a pagoda of tarnished gilt wire! Marjory Cheswick's pet bird! I should have known it among all the feathered denizens of the Canary Islands! But how on earth came it there?

I hastily stepped into the shop and confronted the man behind the counter.

"That cage? It's been here these six months. Redeemed—no, of course not. Fourteen shillings we lent on that cage—'tain't that sort of person redeems things. Can't tell, I'm sure, who left it here."

I slipped a gold piece across the dingy counter with trembling hands.

"Perhaps you might ascertain, by reference to your books, if——"

"Certainly, sir—certainly," said the man, clutching at the coin, while his whole visage relaxed into smiles. "Anything to oblige a gentleman. Let me see—let—me—see! Oh, here it is! January 17, Marjory Ches—Ches——"

I caught the dog's-eared volume and eagerly read the name, followed by an address entirely new to me. It was enough. I had discovered the missing link, and before the astonished shopman had recovered his presence of mind, I was once more pressing through the rain, the mist, the darkness. The mere idea of Marjory Cheswick in want—perhaps in suffering—drove me wild!

"Does Miss Cheswick live here—Miss Marjory Cheswick?"

At any other time my fastidious senses would have revolted from the reeking atmosphere of that dismal house; now I scarcely heeded the noise and squalor.

"Artificial flower maker—upstairs—top floor—back!" growled the voice of someone behind a partially open door, and I had the satisfaction of knowing that I was being thoroughly scanned by unseen eyes belonging to the voice.

Up the narrow, creaking stairs I passed.

My heart seemed almost to stand still as I tapped at the door, beneath which I had distinguished a faint, yellow line of light.

"Come in!" responded a low voice, and I obeyed.

It was a narrow room, whose sloping roof would scarcely permit a person to stand upright in any part of it—with a rusty, fireless grate, and a table where one tallow candle faintly illuminated heaps of half-finished artificial flowers upon which bent a weary, slight figure. As my step sounded on the threshold she looked up.

Ah, how changed—how faded! Yet, how beautiful still! The same golden masses of hair, braided now, instead of hanging in curls; the same blue eyes that had haunted me for ten long years.

"Marjory! Marjory Cheswick!"

She shrank back with a low cry, covering her face with her hands. Had I sought her so long to be discouraged *now?*

I cannot tell how it happened, nor what we said; but the first distinct recollection I have, beyond that dizzy, uncertain moment of recognition, is of Marjory sobbing with her forehead upon my arm. My life's precious jewel! I had found her at last—my constant love had met its reward.

"Oh, Charley, the only friend who found me out in adversity—the only one whose love outlasts grief, and sad, sad troubles! And I had fancied that—that——"

"That I was a fortune-hunter? So I am dearest, and I have found a fortune in your love!"

Pshaw! What is the use of going into details? Doesn't the reader know just what happened afterwards? If he doesn't I shall be very happy to see him any evening in *our* bright little drawing-room, where the green canary sings just as sweetly as if he had never hung under the "three golden balls," and my beautiful wife nourishes the delusion that her husband is a sort of hero.

A hero, indeed! As though any man wouldn't have passed through twice my ordeal to win such a precious treasure.

"Isn't it true, my own Marjory?"

And Marjory hides her face in her baby's neck, and says:

"Nonsense!"

Charles Malcolm.

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FOUND—A HEART.

The Tale of a Mystery that Never Really Existed.

I FOUND Dolly seated on a sofa in her bedroom surrounded apparently by the whole of her worldly possessions—and they were many.

"Good gracious, Dolly," I exclaimed, as I gingerly removed a muslin dress and two hats from a chair and placed them on the already heavily laden bed. "Whatever are you doing? Preparing for a siege?"

"No," said Dolly solemnly, "I'm packing."

I looked at the motley collection and smiled.

"Why don't you take dress baskets instead of those flat things? They are much easier to pack," I said practically.

"Because," returned Dolly in disgusted accents, "I am going to stay with Aunt Dorothea and she *will* drive in to fetch me herself in a horrid cart, and if I arrive with a lot of luggage she fumes and scolds all the time, so I was trying to get everything in those instead, but it seems quite hopeless." And she ran her fingers distractedly through her fluffy hair, which stood out round her small face like a golden halo, and looked at me pathetically with a pair of helpless blue eyes.

Dolly Trevelyan was a spoilt child, a spoilt girl, and now that she is married to an adoring husband is more spoilt than ever.

As a child Dolly was what is called in nursery parlance "a handful," keeping the house in a fever as to what she would do next, and when she grew up and was launched into Society she developed into the most incorrigible flirt, and her unfortunate aunt lived in a state of panic that she would make some undesirable marriage, so when Dolly suddenly and unexpectedly at the end of her fourth season announced her intention of marrying the Hon. Jack Trevelyan, everybody connected with her heaved a sigh of relief.

Their engagement was a short one and lasted only six weeks, and their wedding was celebrated without a hitch. As they drove away, Miss Villiers sank into the nearest chair and said with heartfelt thankfulness in her voice:

"Thank goodness, she is safely married at last."

Personally, though I did not say so, I thought Jack far too good for such a frivolous little minx as Dolly, and it was with grim foreboding as to the future that I departed for a long visit to America. It was a year before I returned to London during which time I heard occasionally of the Trevelyans and their movements, and no hint of any pranks on Dolly's part reached me.

Although Jack's family is all that is to be desired and his prospects excellent, at present he is not very well off, and as Dolly has only what her aunt allows her, the young people's means are limited, so they are "economising" in a flat. When I heard this word in connection with Dolly I smiled, and now as I looked at her and her surroundings, I thought of it again and this time I laughed aloud.

Dolly looked at me reproachfully.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," she said with an injured air. "You might help me instead of sitting there laughing. What am I to do with all these things?"

I was about to offer some advice when a maid entered and asked if "the master" would be in to lunch. On receiving a negative reply she retired and I said:

"Where is Jack, Dolly?"

"Oh, I sent him out and told him not to come back to lunch. He is so big, he gets in my way when I am busy. You may stay, though," she added generously.

"Thank you," I answered a trifle sarcastically, "and do the packing, I suppose?"

"Well, you might help," she said. "I shall never get finished. I have to catch the four o'clock train, and it is nearly lunch time now, and I have done absolutely nothing."

"What are you going to travel in?" I asked.

Dolly looked puzzled.

"What a fortunate thing you thought of that," she said, "I had forgotten all about it, and the dress I want to wear, I *think*, is down at the very bottom of that"—and she pointed to one of the boxes—"I can't go like this, can I?"

As "this" consisted of a frilled dressing jacket and a silk petticoat, I told her not to be silly rather impatiently.

"Well, it must all come out again, I suppose," she said, getting lazily up from the sofa and, kneeling down on the floor, she began to drag out the contents of the box.

"Dolly, Dolly, really you are making an awful lot of trouble and crumpling everything disgracefully—you ought to be ashamed of yourself," I cried.

Dolly stopped and laughed.

"I can't pack," she said, "it's no use. Warren must do it."

"Don't talk nonsense," I said crossly. "Of course you can pack as well as anybody else, only you won't take the trouble. Here, get up and let me do it."

For once in her life Dolly obeyed with alacrity, and, returning to her seat on the sofa, she watched me as I gradually reduced the room to order—putting in desultory remarks and instructions from time to time.

As I gathered up the things that were flung on the floor, a flat leather case dropped out of the folds of a skirt and fell down. I made a movement to pick it up, but Dolly suddenly sprang at it and snatched it away before I could reach it.

"Never mind that," she said hastily, "I will put that in my dressing case."

I looked at her in some surprise—the usually cool, nonchalant Dolly looked flushed and excited as she hastily put the case into a drawer. Naturally my suspicions were roused by her evident desire to prevent me seeing what the case contained, and a hundred ideas immediately flashed through my mind. Dolly had always been a terrible flirt, and, of course, it was not unlikely that she would continue to be so even though she was married, for no one had ever given Dolly credit for much affection for anyone except herself and her own whims. And if my fears were correct, did Jack know? Poor Jack, whose devotion to his wife had been the subject of many remarks among his friends—in all probability he was quite ignorant, and I shuddered to think what would be the result when he did find out, as, of course, he would.

I determined at all costs to wring the truth from Dolly and find out whose portrait it was that she kept concealed among her things—for I felt sure that the case contained a portrait. At any rate I might be able to say something which would make her pause and think before she broke Jack's heart.

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"Heartless, wicked little flirt," I said to myself indignantly, and then aloud, with all the sternness I could put into my voice:

"Dolly, whose portrait is in that case?"

"Why should you think there is a portrait in that case," she answered, "and if there is, I don't see that it is any business of yours. You should not be inquisitive."

"I am not inquisitive," I replied, swallowing my annoyance at her insolence. "But I know how thoughtless you are, and I am afraid that it is some man's portrait that you don't wish me to see—and I really do think, Dolly——"

"I don't see why you should jump to the conclusion that it is a man," said Dolly, two wicked dimples forming at the corners of her mouth, "it might be auntie's, or yours, or——"

"Don't talk nonsense, Dolly, you know perfectly well that it is neither your aunt's nor mine—now, confess, is it not a man?"

"Well, since you are so positive about it—yes."

And to my horror a distinct blush crept up into her cheeks and over her neck.

"Then let me see it."

"Certainly not, I should not think of doing so," she said in a tone of great decision.

I began to feel desperate.

"Dolly, have you thought seriously of what you are doing—of what trouble you are going into—suppose Jack were to find out——"

"Perhaps he knows already," put in Dolly.

"Then it is worse than ever, and I insist on your telling me how far this affair has gone—you have only been married a year, and yet already you have got tired of Jack—and—Dolly, I don't know what to say to you—how can you have the face to stand there and smile—you must be absolutely heartless."

"Really," she said coolly, "you are getting very excited about it. I shall begin to think you take a very great interest in Jack if you take his happiness so much to heart."

It was my turn to blush now, for inadvertently she had hit rather close to the mark. She saw her advantage at once and continued:

"Jack and I are quite old enough to take care of ourselves and our own affairs without any help or interference from outsiders, I should think."

"Dolly, I wish you would tell me how far this affair has gone. Is it really serious or only play?"

"It is really serious, *very* serious," answered Dolly gravely. "The most serious affair that has ever happened to me, and it has gone so far that it is quite impossible to ever draw back."

I made a movement to pick the object up, but Dolly suddenly snatched it away.

With a horrified exclamation I made a movement to open the drawer, but Dolly put her hand on it.

"I did not mean you to know about it," she said, "but since you are so anxious and have found out so much, perhaps it might be as well if you knew more—I always carry that case with me wherever I go, and I do not intend ever to part with it—I shall be buried with it—so that no one else shall ever be able to touch it—if I show it to you will you promise never to breathe a word to anyone—not to auntie, Jack, or anyone?"

"Very well, I promise, but I think you are doing very wrong, Dolly."

"Do you?" said Dolly with a curious little smile as she unlocked the case with a tiny golden key that hung on her chain amongst a lot of charms. Then she put it into my hands.

They trembled a little as I took it from her and raised the lid. Then a stifled exclamation fell from my lips.

Smiling up at me with the brave, honest eyes I knew so well, was an exquisitely painted miniature of Jack Trevelyan.

"Well," said Dolly, "go on with the lecture."

"Dolly—I—I don't understand. Why should you make all this mystery about it?"

"There is no mystery at all—I simply did not want you to see the portrait because no one but myself ever does. You made the mystery yourself by your beastly suspicions——"

She took the case away from me and looked at the picture.

"My Jack," she said softly, and in a voice that I had never heard before. Then she raised her head and looked at me—all in a moment something had come into it which changed her from a frivolous little Society butterfly as I knew her, into a woman who could love and suffer as deeply as the gravest of us—and I realised that I need have no further anxiety on Jack's account—Dolly would not break his heart for she had found her own.

For a few minutes we stood looking at one another, then, as usual, she was the first to speak.

"Now that you have found out my secret perhaps you will be satisfied. It is odd that you should never have considered it possible that I might possess a heart and a conscience as well as you yourself—and that I might love—my husband."

"I beg your pardon, Dolly," I said meekly. "I have misjudged you horribly, but I shall be wiser in future."

Dolly shut the case with a snap and returned to her normal light-hearted manner.

"Do you know," she said with a laugh, "I would have married Jack if he had been a chimney-sweep, and you know how I loathe smuts. And now let's get on with the packing."

B. M. Studdy.

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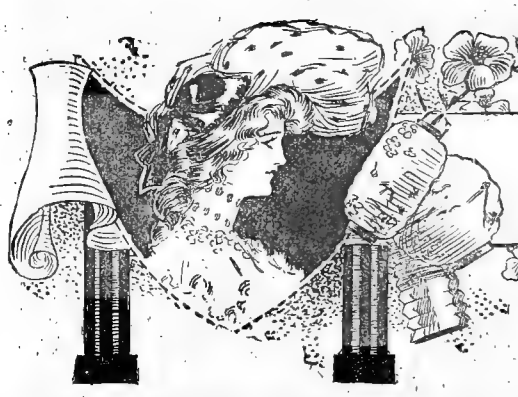

Between Love and Passion.

Showing How Everything Came Right in the End.

My earliest recollections—the saddest and the happiest memories of my life—are centred round the little church of St. Clement's.

My father, who was rector of St. Clement's, died when I was a baby, and five years later my mother married a rich widower with one child, a boy.

Guy Vernon was three years older than I, but he had few playmates of his own age in the quiet little village in which we lived, so we became close friends and constant companions.

Many an hour we spent together in the old graveyard, deciphering the quaint, half-obliterated inscriptions on the moss-grown stones. We were full of the strange fancies and queer conceits of children who are much alone, and in our ways we were rather sober and old-fashioned, as such youngsters are apt to be.

The silence and the gravity of those earlier years always clung to me, but Guy lost much of his when he went to college, and mingled with the world. As for me, I stayed at home, as women used to do, and sometimes I felt myself akin to the fungous growth on the old stones.

We were very fond of each other, Guy and I; we quite forgot for years that we were not brother and sister. But, after awhile, Guy went away to college, and, when he came back, it was different. I began to have admirers, and I mentally compared them all with Guy—greatly to their disadvantage. He had his flirtations, too, I suppose; but I don't think they were ever anything more than the merest flirtations.

Mamma died just before Guy first left home, so papa—as I always called Mr. Vernon—and I were left alone in the big house all through the long, dull winters. The little church was my greatest consolation then; I spent hours there, playing on the organ.

Guy always came home during vacation, and we were very happy together. He was my constant attendant at the various mild festivities, such as picnics and garden-parties, with which the neighbourhood was gay, and days when nothing was going on we would stroll over to St. Clement's, and he would sit and watch me while I played the organ, or talk to me in the intervals when my fingers rested on the keys.

It was a very quiet courtship, if courtship it could be called, for we never said one word about loving each other—never uttered any pledges. But at last Guy began to see that this was what his father wanted, and it aroused all that strange obstinacy which seems to be a part of human nature. I did not blame him, for I, too, resented the calm appropriation of myself, the complacent taking for granted, which Mr. Vernon made too evident.

At last Guy came home permanently to assist his father in the management of his various business interests. The health of Mr. Vernon had been breaking for some time, and I felt very anxious about him.

I don't think Guy saw it so clearly as I—men seldom do see things as quickly as women; but I thought Mr. Vernon perceived it himself. At any rate, he handed over most of his affairs to Guy's superintendence, and I fancied that he had even hinted to his son his wish to see us married while he lived.

The only effect of all this, of course, was to widen the breach between us—that is, if you can call it a breach. It was hardly a coolness, either—simply that difference which only lovers can feel; nor was Guy altogether to blame for it. I knew I had altered, too; but I could not help it.

In the autumn it was decided that some landed interests of Mr. Vernon's in Ireland demanded immediate personal attention, so Guy made his preparations for departure.

Then, somehow, things returned to their former condition between us, and I was very happy, even though he was going away and had not yet said one word of love to me. I felt the difference—that was enough for the present; I was quite content to let the future take care of itself.

Guy went away in the evening, immediately after dinner, so I had to relinquish the hope I had secretly cherished of driving him to the station. He stood, all ready for departure, by the library fire, exchanging a few parting words with us, while he waited for the carriage to arrive.

"It's too bad you have to go, my boy," said Mr. Vernon, in a deprecating tone.

"Oh, I don't mind—it won't be so very bad; you know, I have some pleasant acquaintances there."

"Well, don't let them persuade you to stay too long," answered my step-father, glancing furtively at me. "Are there any fascinating ladies among them?"

"I believe not," responded Guy, laughingly.

"I should think you would be able to finish your business before Michaelmas," continued Mr. Vernon.

"I should think so," agreed Guy. "I'll try to be back as soon after as possible." Then, glancing at his watch, he added: "It's time for me to go."

"Good-bye, my son, and God bless you!" said the old gentleman. "You may go to the door with him, Rachel, but you mustn't watch him drive away—it's bad luck."

I am not sure whether I went myself, or was led by Guy, to the wide, stone vestibule which opened on the porch.

"You must not come any further, dear; you will take cold," he said gently. Then he stooped and kissed me.

For a moment he took both my hands in his, whispering:

"You will not forget me, Rachel?"

A gust of wind blew in my face and I was alone. A branch of the tall plant at the back of me swept across my face, and the rose in my hair—I had given him the one at my throat—fell to the ground. I picked it up, and laid it away in my prayer-book. As if I could forget!

The long weeks of Guy's absence lengthened into months. Michaelmas came and passed, but he did not return. He sent us affectionate letters, saying the business was not yet settled; but I could see his father was annoyed. In February he wrote that his work was finished, but the friends with whom he was staying wanted him to remain and see a little of the country, which he had been too busy to do previously.

Mr. Vernon was angry, but he left the decision to me, and, of

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course, I urged Guy to stay—I had no right to call him to my side, no claim upon his duty.

In March, however, my step-father had a slight stroke of paralysis, and I summoned Guy home. He came; but the instant I saw him I knew he had changed, and then my chief anxiety was to conceal the alteration from his father, who was not, I knew, strong enough to bear any disappointment.

With Guy came his friend, Will Marston, whose home was in Glenlough, but who had been travelling in Germany during my step-brother's long absence, so that the two had seen nothing of each other.

Mr. Marston had returned just two days before Guy left, and the latter had insisted on a visit from his friend, with whom he had been very intimate during their college days.

The doctor did not think my step-father dangerously ill, nor did he recommend us to avoid society. He warned us, however, against any excitement, anxiety, or thwarting of the invalid's wishes, and knowing the one supreme desire of old Mr. Vernon, and how little probability there was of its being fulfilled, I lived in constant dread.

In spite of his friend's presence, I could see that Guy chafed under an almost uncontrollable restlessness, which he managed to hide pretty well from the two men, though not from me. Was he longing to get back to Glenlough?

Afterwards I knew he was. Of course, it was impossible for him to go; for, as his father grew better, and became more like himself, there was a good deal of business to be attended to, which had been necessarily somewhat neglected during Guy's absence and his father's illness.

Mr. Marston's presence was a great boon to both Guy and myself during those trying days, for it enabled us to avoid uncomfortable *têtes-à-têtes*. Besides, he was an exceedingly agreeable man, and enlivened us very much. Indeed, if I could have got rid of the miserable sensation of living over a volcano, and in momentary expectation of an explosion, I should have enjoyed the young man's society.

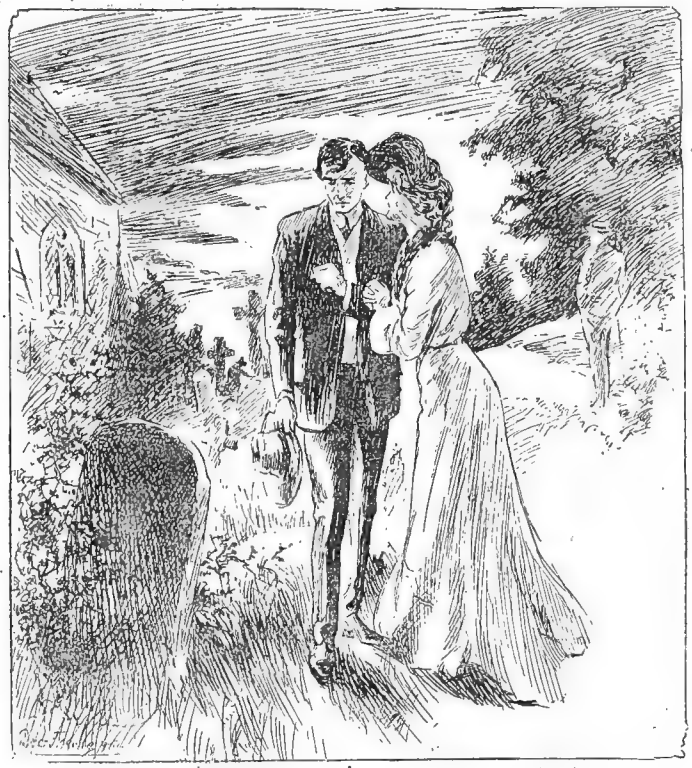
In spite of a cordial liking for his son's friend, I fancied that my step-father would have been glad to see him go; for, as his health improved, Mr. Vernon once more became anxious to see things settled between Guy and myself, and, of course, this could not be expected while the visitor remained. The invalid clearly saw that his days were numbered; and he longed, I felt sure, with what was to me a pitiable longing, to see his two nearest and dearest safely united before he left us. To die with one's heart's desire, the latest desire of life unfulfilled, seemed to me hard then—it has seemed so ever since.

If it had not been for Guy's sake I think I could have borne, to make my step-father happy, that hardest of all lots—to be the unloved wife of a husband I loved.

That Mr. Vernon had hinted to Mr. Marston his hopes and belief regarding Guy and me, was evident from some remarks the young man made a few days before his departure.

It was a perfect Spring morning, and we were walking towards an old wood that lay between us and the little church. It was a favourite walk with all three of us; but Guy had been called to attend to some important business, so we two had started off without him, he promising to join us later, if possible.

Oddly enough, that very morning's post had brought a letter in a strange hand, and, feeling that it must contain bad news, though I could not explain why, I put it in my pocket unopened. It was lying there now, and I was wondering when I should have courage to open it. You see I was peculiar.



Guy stopped before an unpretentious stone whereon was written: "Hope Anstice, aged eighteen."

To my dying day I shall never forget how beautiful the old wood looked in the soft Spring sunshine, for it never looked quite the same again.

"This is a lovely spot," said Mr. Marston, in the half-meditative, half-regretful tone one uses in speaking of a place one is soon to leave.

"Yes," I answered dreamily.

"I envy you and Guy, I believe," he went on, laughingly.

The evident coupling of our names annoyed me.

"Unfortunately, it may not always be my home," I replied with a rasped note in my voice.

"But——" began Mr. Marston, then stopped embarrassed.

"Mr. Vernon cannot live many years longer," I said sadly, "and, of course, as you know, Guy is not any real relation. Perhaps he will soon bring home a wife; but even then I could hardly stay."

"I thought there was no expectation of his bringing home a wife," replied my companion.

The young man ventured the remark rather hesitatingly, but the emphasis on the "bring" was too evident.

I frowned.

"Has Guy been taking you into his confidence? Surely I have not given you any reason to suppose such a thing?"

I tried to keep the anger out of my voice, and keep it unconcerned.

"Oh, no; but Mr. Vernon——"

"Has been telling you what he wished," I interrupted, not trying to conceal my anger now. "Unfortunately, Guy's wishes and mine do not coincide with his."

"I beg your pardon," said the young man humbly; but he gave me a side glance, and I had a wretched suspicion that he was keener sighted than most of his sex.

Of course, we talked of other things during the rest of the

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walk, in which, after all, Guy did not join us; but I had an unaccountable feeling that my revelation had annoyed Mr. Marston, though I could not imagine any reason why it should. I was the one to be angry.

Before we finished our stroll, however, anxiety for my step-father forced me to make a request of my companion.

"You will not mention to anyone what I have told you this morning?" I said. "It would be a great disappointment to Mr. Vernon to know it, and, coming suddenly, would be almost more than he could bear."

"Oh, certainly not," Mr. Marston made answer briefly; but I could scarcely help fancying that he disapproved of our reticence.

When we got back to the house, I went to my room, and read my letter—I might as well have all the disagreeables over in one morning.

Then I burnt it.

No one should know anything about its contents, not even Guy.

"You look tired, Miss Rachel," said Mr. Marston, at luncheon; "I'm afraid you walked too far this morning."

"Oh, no; it is only a headache," I answered smiling.

Was that all the difference it made to be heart-broken? Well, I was glad of it, for my step-father was looking at me anxiously.

I glanced over at Guy. How pale and thin he was!

In two days Mr. Marston was gone, and then I began to wonder how much longer we could temporise. Not much longer.

I was coming downstairs one morning, when I heard voices in the library. The door was ajar, and I saw my step-father sitting at his desk, speaking to good Mrs. Dent, the housekeeper, who had helped me to nurse him so faithfully during his illness.

"Send Mr. Guy to me at once," he said. "And where is Miss Rachel? I want her, too."

"Here I am," I answered gently, going into the room, while Mrs. Dent departed, looking rather scared at the unwonted severity of her employer's tone.

"I have tried to bring Guy to the point often enough—I am tired of this shilly-shallying," commenced my step-father. I trembled within me, for I knew the storm must break now. "Sit down," he continued almost impatiently.

I obeyed him, and then Guy entered. He came straight towards me.

"Please go out, Rachel," he said. "I have an important communication to make to my father."

"But I want her to stay," thundered Mr. Vernon. "Is she not your promised wife?"

"No," answered Guy sadly. "Will you go, Rachel?"

I rose at once with the words.

"When Guy has finished what he has to say, you can send for me if you want me."

Then, approaching Mr. Vernon, and obeying an irresistible impulse, I stooped to kiss the wrinkled forehead, and immediately left the room.

I went upstairs and waited, I do not know how long, but it was not very long. I opened my door and sat and listened with bursting heart and feverish anxiety for some sound.

At last it came. There was a fall and a cry.

I flew downstairs to the library. It was as I had feared—my step-father had had another stroke.

My strongest feeling was for Guy kneeling by his father's side, ghastly pale, and moaning:

"I have killed him! I have killed him!"

"Hush, Guy," I said, laying my hand gently on the poor boy's shoulder; "help me to lift him."

By this time Mrs. Dent and the servants, hearing the noise, had appeared, and I sent at once for a physician. He soon arrived, but shook his head when he looked at the sufferer.

Mr. Vernon lingered several weeks, part of the time unconscious, but clinging to his son in a way that was pitiful. It almost broke my poor darling's heart.

At last the end came, and I did my best to comfort Guy. When all was over, I tried to rouse him by calling his attention to a pile of letters he had neglected for days. He opened them mechanically, and looked at them, then he gave a low moan and gasped out:

"It seems to be my destiny to kill people, Rachel; I must go away at once."

I asked no questions, but helped him to make his preparations.

"God bless you, Rachel," he said, as he bade me "Goodbye"; "I am not worthy of your kindness."

He went to Glenlough, of course. He wrote to me affectionately from there, but he did not tell me why he stayed. So, when a widowed friend asked me to accompany her to Florence, I willingly consented. I informed Guy of my intention, and he urged me to carry it out. He did not come to see me before I went, though he sent me many kind farewell messages.

Leaving the house in care of Mrs. Dent, I put the old life behind me, and spent two happy years abroad. It was the calm after the storm. I felt that life, youthful, passionate life, was over for me. I had gone through my keenest joy, my keenest sorrow. I could never know either again; but I had won peace and content out of the struggle, and, perhaps, these were the best.

Guy did not write to me, and I was glad of it—it would only have stirred the embers of the past. I heard occasionally of him through Mrs. Dent. He was living quietly at home, alone—why, I knew. Six lines in a Tipperary paper, sent to me soon after I left England, told me.

At the end of two years' sojourn, my friend decided that she must return home. Accordingly we made our preparations.

Just before our departure I received a letter from Guy, telling me he had learnt, through Mrs. Dent, ofour intended coming, and begging us to spend a few days with him.

After a little hesitation I decided to accept the invitation if my friend were willing. I longed for a sight of the dear old house and my beloved St. Clement's, and I knew I must meet Guy some time, so I might as well get over the pain at once.

My feverish impatience during the long journey told me that the past was not as dead as I had believed it to be, but I tried to hope that a glimpse of the old things would quiet me.

When we reached our destination we found Guy waiting to receive us. He was somewhat changed—older and graver-looking—but still the same Guy to me. His greeting was cordial but not demonstrative.

Two days went by without awkwardness, thanks to my friend, who was unaware of any hidden current. Guy made himself very agreeable to her, and, when I could, I stole off by myself to spend hours filled with memories, sad and joyful, in the little churchyard.

On the third day I was sitting in the shadow of a great tree, alone with my dead, when I heard footsteps, and, looking up, saw Guy approaching. He came close to where I sat, and looked down at me sadly.

"You have a right here," he said bitterly.

I took his hand and pressed it—I could not find words to answer.

Perhaps my action emboldened him, for he went on in a less bitter tone:

"You were always very good to me, Rachel, in the old days. Will you do one thing more for me now?"

He was looking down at me and I thought I should choke—my heart had got up into my throat, and I could only answer him with a little inclination of the head.

At his next words my heart returned to its usual place and my voice came back.

"I want you and your friend to take a little journey with me; will you?"

"Yes," I answered, rising to go back to the house, and nothing more was said.

My friend was surprised when the proposition was made to her, but she readily consented; and, two days later, we were in Glenlough.

In the afternoon Mr. Marston came over to see us. He was to leave on a journey by the early evening train, and brought all his travelling paraphernalia with him.

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Just as twilight began to fall, Guy asked me to take a walk. My friend declared she had a headache, and preferred to lie down, but insisted on my going; so we started, accompanied by Will Marston, prepared to take the train on leaving us. I had noticed that the railway station was beyond the church, so I was not much surprised when we turned our steps in that direction.

When we reached it, instead of going past, Guy drew my arm within his, and led me into the quiet graveyard, more quiet in the twilight stillness than ever. Mr. Marston had fallen behind, and I think we both forgot his presence for the moment.

Guy stopped before an unpretentious stone, whereon was written: "Hope Anstice, aged eighteen."

That was all.

"Rachel," he began, "I have something to say to you."

I was going to interrupt him; then I remembered that sometimes confession is almost like baptism for sin, and I simply clasped my hands pityingly over his arm.

"I don't know whether you can ever forgive me or not, dear," he went on; "but I must tell you all now. I ought to have told you long ago, but I had not the courage. Here by her grave I will confess everything.

"Once upon a time, Rachel, I believed you cared for me; perhaps I was mistaken, but that did not make my sin any the less. When I left you that night I thought we belonged to each other.

"Then I went to Glenlough, and met Hope Anstice. It was a brief and sudden passion, very unlike my love for you; it carried everything before it, and, when she told me she returned my love, but that there was a kind of engagement with a distant cousin—a sort of family affair—I begged her to put an end to all difficulties by a secret marriage.

"She consented, and the day before I went away it took place. I did not then know who this distant cousin was, but I learnt afterwards. Can you guess, Rachel? It was Will Marston."

I glanced back with a start, but Mr. Marston was strolling about some little way off, and did not seem to see us.

"Well?" I whispered, turning to Guy, who continued slowly:

"You know now why I was so changed when I came home, Rachel, and what it was I said to my father when he insisted on my asking you to marry me. It was the truth, and I could not help telling him; but the shock killed him. I was not brave enough to let you know, for I had found out my mistake; I had learnt too late the difference between love and passion. In my father's dying hours I neglected everything, even my wife, and the first news I learnt was that Hope was going into a decline. Of course, I thought it was my fault—that I killed her, too—and I hurried to her side. But the doctors said it was a foregone conclusion—an inheritance; and, indeed, she had not been very unhappy.

"When I saw her, I would have made our marriage public; but she compelled me to secrecy. That was one of the penalties I had to bear.

"'It will hurt Will,' she said, 'and he has always been the kindest friend I ever had.'

"You see, my punishment has not been light."

There was a pause, then Guy added:

"She only lived six weeks afterwards—it was what they call 'galloping consumption'; and poor Will was with her nearly all the time—she told him everything. Can you guess why I have made this confession here and now, Rachel? Can you forgive my falseness and cowardice?"

"My poor Guy, I have known this for a long time," I said gently.

He looked at me in a bewildered way, and I went on:

"Mr. Marston wrote and told her that you and I were engaged, and she sent me a letter"—I did not add "a bitter one"—"disclosing the truth."

"And you have known this all the while, my Rachel?"

For answer, I hid my face on his breast, and there, by her grave, we pledged our solemn, chastened happiness. Then I led Guy away.

"Don't you understand?" I whispered, pointing silently to Mr. Marston.

He was standing, oblivious of our presence, in the place where we had been, and I heard him murmur, as Guy and I turned away:

"She is all mine now."

Anne Chambers.

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Charming Girl!

SHE: "Why didn't you warn me you were going to kiss me?" He: "Why?" She: "I would have made it easier for you."

Two Birds with One Stone.

HE: "Will you marry me?" She: "No." He: "Then will you marry my cousin Tom? He requested me to ask you while I was about it."

A Fact.

SHE: "Yes, this is Mr. Gamboge, the artist. He is wedded to his art." He: "Judging from his appearance I should say that he didn't marry for money."

A Friend's Advice.

ENGAGED YOUTH: "Well, how am I to know whether Dora has any faults or not?" Friend: "That's easy enough. All you have to do is to ask some friend of hers who is jealous.'

All That was Left.

YOUNG TUTTER: "Did you get that box of chocolates I left here last night, Miss Clara?" Miss Pinkerly: "You left it with my younger brother, did you not?" Tutter: "Yes." Miss Pinkerly: "I got the box."

He was Proud Though Poor.

"I WANT you to understand, sir, that my pride forbids me to accept anything from you after I marry your daughter." "How are you going to live?" "Well, I thought you might make some kind of a settlement beforehand."

The Worm Turned.

"OH, Mr. Childer, you are really too young to know anything about love," said the old flirt, after she had listened to his proposal. "Yes," said Childer, smiling weakly, "but I knew you were old enough to teach me." Score even, and she never forgave him.

Silly Idiot!

HE crept stealthily to her side, and, in an agitated whisper, asked: "Can you keep a secret?" With a yearning look in her eyes, she replied: "Why, of course. You ought to know I can! What is it?" "Oh, nothing at all. I just wanted to know, you know." And as she turned away, the congealed look she gave him put ice in his veins.

She Longed to be Ashore.

"AND what are we doing now, Fred?" "Only hugging the shore, Louie, dear." "Fred,"—and she looked at him in a far-away manner—"Fred, I wish I were ashore." "Why, Louie, darling, you are not feeling ill, are you?" he asked, in a tone of alarm. Then he looked at her again, and thought he discovered a ghost of a twinkle in her downcast eyes, and the shimmer of a smile playing round the corners of her mouth. He looked once more, he was sure of it. The next moment Fred was enacting the part of the yacht, and Louie was impersonating the shore.

In Doubt.

GEORGE: "I will be a true husband to you, Mabel." Mabel: "No, George, I can't believe it. You are too good to be true."

True to Her Word.

SUE: "You said you were going to marry an artist, and now you're engaged to a dentist." Flo: "Well, isn't he an artist? He draws from real life."

He Had Expectations.

SHE: "I trust, Jack, our marriage will not be against your father's will?" Jack: "I'm sure I hope not. It would be jolly hard for us if he should change it."

The Wane of the Honeymoon.

FRIEND: "So the romance has faded already?" Young Wife: "Romance? There is nothing of the kind left, except my husband's excuses for coming home late from the club."

The Result of Short Sight.

"YOUR marriage was the result of love at first sight, wasn't it?" "Yes," replied the near-sighted friend. "I never shall forget that day. It was the only time in my life I was ever known to forget my glasses."

He was in a Terrible Plight.

BANKS: "When are they to be married?" Rivers: "Never." Banks: "Never! And why not?" Rivers: "She will not marry him until he has paid his debts, and he cannot pay his debts until she marries him." Banks: "Oh!"

He Came.

"MY love," said he, when they had just returned from their wedding trip, "if I'm not home from the club by—er—ten, love, you won't wait?" "No, dear," replied the wife of his bosom, with appalling firmness, "I'll come for you!" He was back by 9.45, sharp.

Indeed She Was.

YOUNG HUSBAND: "Now, love, which will you have—the watch, the bracelets, or the necklace?" Young Wife: "We must avoid unnecessary expense, dear. I'm sure if you buy all three the man will give you a reduction on them. I'm your own saving, economical little wifey, aren't I?"

Comforting for the Old Chap.

ELDERLY FIANCÉ: "I hope you are not impressed by the silly sentimentalists who hold that because you've been married once you ought not to marry again." Pretty Widow: "Don't let that worry you, dear. I've no such prejudice My own dear mother was married three times, and I only hope that in all things I may follow her example."

Her Reason.

HE: "I believe you cared for me the first time we ever met." She: "Why, what makes you think so?" He: "Because you kept looking at me so steadily. Every time I glanced in your direction your gaze was riveted on me." She: "Oh, but it wasn't because I had fallen in love with you. I was thinking what a pity it was there was no one near and dear to you who could tell you what wretched taste you had in neckties."

In a Dilemma.

"I HAVE come to see you, sir, on a delicate mission," said the young man. "What is it?" the old gentleman asked. "Well, sir, you have two beautiful daughters," explained the young man. "I proposed to one of them last night, and I —I——" "Which one?" interrupted the old gentleman. "Don't you know?" asked the young man aghast. "Certainly not. I've seen you with both." The young man sighed and reached for his hat. "I thought you might," he said. "I've been very attentive, and I was sometimes in doubt myself, seeing they're twins; but I got on all right till I proposed. And now—now—— Hang it all, sir, if you don't know which one accepted me, I don't! and now I've got to begin all over again!"

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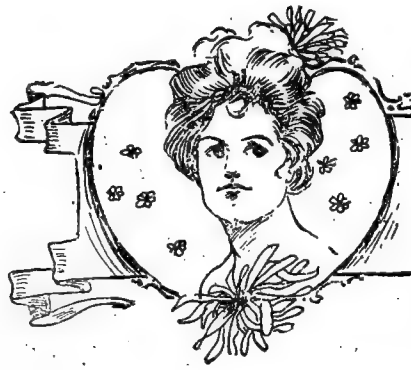

Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

No. VIII.—THE DIFFICULTY OF HUGH CHESTER.

In a long chair, in the coolest of garments, with a glass of something refreshing at his elbow, Hugh Chester lay, puffing cigar smoke lazily from his lips as he dreamily gazed away from the shade of his cool verandah into the luxuriant tropical vegetation that bounded the small clearing in which his house stood on the high mountains above Colombo.

Hugh was a successful coffee-planter, and he had not become that without energy and hard work, and it was only during this hour of heat, when man and beast must rest if they would live, that he allowed himself to dream, even over the letters of the young girl who was now on her way to Ceylon to marry him.

The one he held in his hand ran as follows:

"Dear Old Hugh,—*After all I am coming out by the 'Palawan' instead of the 'Somali,' which will get me out a fortnight sooner than you bargained for. I hope you will not be sorry; if you are, you will have to disguise your feelings, for I shall have started by the time you have got this. The reason I have changed my adamantine mind is that I have arranged to go out with my old friend, Kathleen Bertram, who must go by that boat to join her father. He will meet her at Colombo and take her on to Calcutta. We shall both be under the care of the captain, so you need not be anxious how I shall behave.*

"*You funny old thing! Why should you think I might not love you when I saw you? If you only knew what a dull, miserable life you are taking me from here! You may be sure I should find anyone charming after the loving kindness of my step-mother. And then, if you saw my clothes! Father has been quite generous. I suppose he is so delighted to get rid of the element of discord, and is anxious at the last to make up for years of miserliness. Well, you know he really has been miserly, and I have never had even decent clothes to wear before. You may imagine, therefore, how much I love you already for procuring me freedom and clothes, and even some fun, I hope.*

"*I'm sorry my photo will not be ready in time to send you, but I hope you will know me. If I should chance to miss you I will go straight to the house of your friend, Mrs. Grimley. That will be all right, I suppose? I am tremendously excited. No time for more.—Your ever loving,* Kit."

It was more like the letter of a child going away on her first visit than that of a woman coming across the ocean to marry the man of her choice, and Hugh could not repress a feeling of disappointment that there was no hint of anything deeper, but he checked a sigh, and said half aloud:

"How ridiculous to expect her to really love me, whom she has not seen since she was a child of nine!"

And a smile came to his face as he conjured up the image of his pretty little, hot-tempered cousin throwing her doll at his head because he had suggested that her treatment of it was rather drastic for a loving mother.

Somehow he had always felt an affectionate interest in the untrained, motherless girl, so easy to lead, but so impossibe to drive; and when her father married again, and she was packed off to a boarding-school, he began a desultory correspondence with her, partly to cheer her and encourage her to work, and partly to cheat himself into the belief that he, the lonely one without father, mother, sister, or brother, had home ties in that England to which his heart still turned.

A lonely man at thirty, finding his pleasure in work, and old beyond his years by reason of his early struggle with the world, he had, after long deliberation, and in reply to miserable letters from her describing her constant quarrels with her step-mother, written her an offer of marriage, which she had accepted without a moment's hesitation. There was no need for delay, just the time for her to get the necessary outfit, and she started immediately.

Truth to say, his heart sank at times at the thought of his bold stroke for happiness, and he wondered whether he had done wisely. It was ten years since he had seen her, and beyond her school-girl letters, he knew nothing of what she might have grown into. Suppose she should find it impossible to love him? This was the thought that troubled him the most. There would be no sweet period of courtship in which he might teach her to love him; she, a mere child, would be straightway plunged into the cares and responsibilities of married life.

Then in the great stillness of the mid-day, when all the world seems sleeping, a thought came to him which made him start up with unwonted animation.

"Bravo! The very thing! I'll go and join her steamer, under an assumed name, at Aden, and make love to her till we reach Colombo. I'll see about it at once." And he summoned his bearer, and began to give him the necessary instructions about his clothes.

Under all his gravity and staidness, Hugh Chester was at heart still youthful and romantic, and the flavour of adventure and romance about this idea recommended it strongly to him, therefore it was with a light heart that he boarded the steamer at Colombo, a week later, to meet the *Palawan* at Aden.

The first evening that he took his seat, under the name of Hugh Chichester, at the dining-table in the huge electric-lighted saloon of the great liner, he let his eyes wander curiously amongst the guests, wondering in an amused manner if he would be able to pick out his *fiancée* in the crowd of ladies present; for beyond a vague remembrance of a child with a

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shock head of brown hair and rather light eyes, either blue or grey, he had no idea of her personal appearance, and he could not picture to himself what she might have become as a woman.

At last his eyes rested on the girl seated on his left, and a wish was immediately formed that it might be she.

She was tall and slender, with the pleasing slenderness of a girl's half-developed figure. Her face, fair and delicately tinted, was lighted by a pair of large grey eyes, with sweeping lashes, that added a mysterious depth to their colour; while the dark brown of her wavy hair gave a distinction to her appearance that was a charm in itself.

Hugh, however, sternly told himself there was only one person for him to fall in love with, and he must feel no interest in anyone till he was sure it was the right one.

Nevertheless, his heart gave a bound of joy when, as she rose from the table, the card that had marked her place fell to the ground, and he read on it, "Miss Burton." However, to make sure, he approached the captain and questioned him.

"Why, yes," he replied, "that is Miss Burton. She is under my care till we reach Colombo, where, I believe, she is to meet the man she is coming out to marry. Lucky man, I say! I wish her friend were more like her; 'pon my word, I shall be glad to hand that young lady over to her father!"

After this it did not take Hugh long to get an introduction to her, and before the next day was over they were well on the way to become friends.

The more he saw of her the more deeply Hugh fell in love with her, and the more the piquancy of the position struck him the more he congratulated himself on his lucky inspiration. As the days flew by he could see that she was far from disliking him, but he was convinced she was too unversed in these matters to see whither their friendly intercourse was leading them; and he pictured his awakening her to the true state of the case at the same time as he should reveal to her that he was her real *fiancé* and no stranger.

Despite, however, their intimate footing, he was always met by an invincible reserve whenever he tried to ask about her home relations and her future in India. He felt it was the one thing that made her perfect. The childish outspokenness in her letters was for him alone; for others there was a dignified reticence.

"Is that young lady a friend of yours?" he asked, when he had been on board a couple of days, as an exceedingly lively girl with merry blue eyes nodded gaily and waved her hand as she moved nearer the band with her attentive escort of chosen young men.

"Yes," replied Miss Burton, "we are old school-friends, and are now both going out to Colombo under the care of the captain."

"Oh, then she is Miss Bertram," said Hugh, without thinking, and then saw what a mistake he had made.

His companion looked at him in surprise. "Do you know her, then?" she asked.

"Oh, no," he cried hurriedly; "only I heard the captain had a Miss Burton and a Miss Bertram under his care as far as Colombo, and I guessed that must be she," and then, to turn her attention from his confusion, he added: "She seems to be having a good time," alluding to her train of young men, and her open flirtation with one of the ship's officers, which he had already noticed was the cause of much amusement to the other passengers.

Miss Burton flashed an indignant glance at him from her frank grey eyes.

"She is such a child, and has had such a dull life at home."

Hugh was pleased at her loyalty, and longed to say, "So have you, but you don't behave like that," but he recollected that she had an additional safeguard in that she was engaged, and would think it wrong to flirt. His ideas were somewhat old-fashioned.

"I beg your pardon," he replied, "I ought not to have criticised your friend's conduct, which cannot concern me. All the same, if you will excuse my saying it, as having so much more experience of the world than either of you, it would be as well if you warned your friend that she is causing remark among the passengers."

"She is going to someone who will know how to take care of her," she answered, "and I do not like discussing my friends behind their backs."

Two evenings later he was leaning over the ship's side with Miss Burton, and a silence had fallen upon them at the sight of the glorious tropical moonlight on the heaving ocean, a silence that showed an intimacy that was full of sweetness. She, feeling the balmy air laden with unspoken love, found the silence fraught with too much meaning, and said:

"Is it not beautiful?"

Hugh, however, answered with seeming irrelevance:

"To-morrow we shall be in Colombo."

For some minutes they said nothing, but at last she remarked:

"It has been a very pleasant voyage," and her voice broke over the commonplace words.

"Since Aden——" he prompted, taking her slim white hand in his, and he folded her in his arms.

Suddenly she drew herself away, stopping the very words on his lips.

"Oh, stop, Mr. Chichester, before you say one word more; I must tell you the truth about myself; I cannot keep up the deception any longer. You think I am Kit Burton. I am not. I am Kathleen Bertram."

"Good God!" cried Hugh, recoiling in horror.

"I suppose," she went on hurriedly, "you think I am very wicked to be travelling under an assumed name and telling so many lies, but it was only to please my friend Kit. Now do listen to me before you judge either of us," and she put her hand on his arm as he leant heavily on the ship's rail with averted head. His horror seemed to her rather disproportionate to her offence, yet she felt she was fighting for what was more to her than friendship.

"Kit was a dear friend of mine," she continued, "and I was delighted to hear she was going to be married and get away from her unhappy home. When we arranged to travel together she begged me to change names with her. She said she had never had any fun or freedom in her life, and was now going to be married to a man much older than herself, and she wanted to have her fling first. You must not blame her, she is such a child, and she will no doubt make him all the better wife for it. She did not want to go out labelled 'engaged,' she said, she wanted to have fun without the captain and everybody crying 'fie!' upon her. So I consented. I did not like it, but she says she has had a splendid time, *the* time of her life; and, after all," she added defiantly, for she began to resent his continued silence, "it has done no harm to anyone."

Hugh repressed a groan. No harm!

Then Miss Kathleen Bertram grew angry with him. What difference could it make to him? Why did he not reassure her with the words of love that she had only checked through an exaggerated idea of honour? And she cried indignantly:

"I suppose *you* have never got yourself into a mess through trying to oblige a friend, Mr. Chichester; and since you evidently think I have sinned past forgiveness, I will cease to trouble you with my presence. Good evening," and she sailed away with a dignity that only lasted till she reached her cabin.

Shaking off at last the icy feeling of despair that seemed to cause a physical numbness, Hugh turned and stretched out his arms to her with a gesture of love and longing, but she was gone, and he let his arms fall again to his side with a groan. What had Kit done in her wish for fun and flirting? What had he done in his romantic attempt to gain the love of his bride before they were wedded? How could he blame the girl when, after all, it was his little plot, so innocent in intention, that had turned the comedy into a tragedy?

And how was he to unravel the tangled skein? Was he bound to the young girl to whom he had practically confessed his love, and whose heart he had so successfully set himself to win, or to the light-minded little flirt who had journeyed across the ocean to marry him, and from whom he turned with a real dislike?

L. Hughes.

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LORD POLLYPOD.

The Tale of a Postponed Marriage.

"Well, mum, if I had been hung for it I couldn't have helped laughing, Miss Roper was so set up about that *lord*. He wasn't much to look at; a slim little man, with tow-coloured whiskers; but as soon as he came along she began to feel as if the world was turned topsy-turvy.

"My Lord Pollypod was a-sayin' so and so to Maria last Sunday. My Lord Pollypod admires that flower of Maria's so much. My lord and my lord this, that, and t'other, until I was sick of it. You see, I waited at table, and showed folks their rooms, and was always doing something or other upstairs, so I knew more of it than cook and Bridget, and I took a dislike to him at once.

"He was so prim and solemn—and he took such airs, and then I did like to see Mr. Thomas Tallman go about with Miss Maria. He was a fine man if you wanted to see one, and as good as he was handsome.

"But you see, missus having come into property when her uncle, the great soap man died, got stylish, and forgot all about the Tallmans; and missus thought Maria ought to do better for herself; and when my Lord Pollypod was introduced she broke off one match and made another. I don't know how she did it; by sheer scolding and nagging, I expect. Miss Maria was awfully afraid of her mother, and she thought Mr. Tallman took his defeat too easily, as perhaps he did, and she let pride get the better of her love.

"Rich! Well, they said he was so rich that he could buy up half the country if he wanted it. It couldn't be money he was after if that was so, and if he loved her, why, that was all you could expect. And as the wedding-day came on, why, his presents showed his generosity.

"'Really, you are too generous,' I heard missus say to my lord.

"'Madam,' said he, 'these few little things are not worth mentioning between people of our wealth,' and missus laughed.

"'Certainly I have a hundred thousand pounds,' said she, 'but you must think me poor with your millions.'

"'Oh, of course not!' answered he, 'but, pray, never speak again of the few pounds I have spent; a trinket or two, a fan, some lace—bah!'

"But, really, there was a splendid bracelet—all diamonds; rings, pins. The engagement ring blazed! Such lace! Why, a queen couldn't have had finer, though poor Miss Maria hardly looked at anything.

"Every now and then some present came from a jeweller's, newer and finer than the last, and Miss Maria got paler and thinner all the while.

"At last she asked her mother if she could go down to Oakwood to see her cousin Ellen, who had a deformity in her back, poor thing, and couldn't, or wouldn't, go out much, and her mother said:

"'Yes, if you don't go to the Tallmans,' and she answered:

"'Mother, I should be ashamed to see them,' and I went with her to the station.

"'Take care of yourself, miss,' said I, as I left her in her seat in the train.

"'Nothing will happen to *me*, Sally,' said she. 'Things happen to those that want to live.'

"After that I hadn't much heart in helping with the wedding preparations.

"She was to come home on the fourth of the month. December it was. On the eighth the wedding was to take place. Minister was told, and company invited. Cards were out for the ceremony in church and for the reception; but, on the fourth a message came from Miss Maria. It was snowing hard, and I remember the boy shaking the snow off his hat and coat before he came into the hall. The message was this:

"'Trains stopped by the snow; cannot come to-day.'

"'Provoking!' said missus, as she read the words, and she looked worried all day. The next, and the next—the fifth and the sixth—there was no news at all. On the seventh another message came:

"'Snowing still. Impossible to come till the storm is over.'

"And on the wedding-morning another, with these words:

"'Storm over. Will come on Friday.'

"Now Wednesday was the wedding-day, and how my lord went on.

"'Postpone the marriage?' he cried. That could not be. Could he not go for her? Was it impossible? He went to the station, and found that it was. He came back in a fury, but that did no good. The church was closed. The minister went home. The guests were notified in a great hurry and my lord was in a fearful fury. He looked more than angry. He looked frightened. And it is unlucky we know to postpone a wedding.

"However, Friday came, and with it Miss Maria. She looked a little better than when she went away, and the first thing she asked was how Lord Pollypod took the delay.

"'You may have lost him by it, Maria,' said missus solemnly. 'He is in a dreadful rage.'

"Miss Maria looked as if she didn't care about his temper, and wouldn't mind his loss, but she said nothing.

"'I've sent for him,' the missus said. 'He'll come, I suppose, but the nobility are not used to such conduct.'

"'The weather behaves to suit them, I suppose,' said Miss Maria.

"And just then back came the footman.

"'My lord's compliments, and he'd drive over at once.'

"And I looked at Miss Maria and saw something in her face that made me feel like saying:

"'Oh, what is it, Miss Maria? What is it?'

"Lord Pollypod did come in less than no time; and

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Miss Maria took him away into the conservatory—to explain matters, she said; she that hated so to be alone with him always. And then there came a ringing of the bell, and I went to see who it was, for though the man opened the door, I always took the card to miss or missus.

"'A bill for missus,' said Peter.

"'I should like to see Mrs. Roper,' said a young man with an envelope in his hand.

"And I showed him into the reception room, and called missus. After that ring, not one but twenty; one young man after another, one after the other, and then missus' voice, so loud that I could not help going to the door.

"'Bills for me?' I heard her say. 'I owe nothing. What does this mean? Is it a conspiracy? I've always paid cash for everything.'

"'The lady must be very forgetful,' said one of the young men.

"'Certainly we know that Mrs. Roper has always bought for cash,' said another.

"'And we liked to have an account with so rich a lady, so responsible a lady,' said a young Jewish man.

"'Perhaps if I mention that Mrs. Roper's future son-in-law, Lord Pollypod, ordered the things to be paid for to-day, Mrs. Roper will understand.'

"'Lord Pollypod!' cried missus, turning white. And she took the bills and read them aloud—bills for the rings and brooches he'd given Miss Maria; for the bracelets, the fans, the lace; bills for clothes and jewellery for himself—for everything you can think of; a bill for board at a great hotel, another for carriages and horses—all to be settled by Mrs. Roper.

"'I see how it is,' said the man from the hotel, turning to the others, 'this is a swindle, and Mrs. Roper is swindled worst of all, if her daughter is his wife. He told us, madam, that you, like many rich Americans, were glad to pay for a title in the family, and that we were to come to you the day after the wedding.'

"'Which ain't come off, thank goodness!' cried I, jumping up and down with joy.

"Just then came another ring at the bell—a gentleman, very fine and elegant, who bowed low to missus, and said:

"'Can I speak to you alone?' and offered his card.

"'Lord Pollypod,' was on it.

"Missus, bowing and walking into another room with him, said:

"'Lord Pollypod! I don't understand.' And he answered:

"'Madam, I fear that you have been deceived by an impostor—a servant of mine who robbed me and has travelled in this country under my name. I am George, Lord Pollypod, and the only living person who has a right to the name.'

"And then missus, with such a look, goes off into hysterics, and I see a kind of struggle in the hall, and there is the man who has called himself Lord Pollypod in the hands of the police officers.

"He had expected to be married, and off with everything three days before; and no wonder he was frightened at the delay of the wedding. But to think of how it all came about! How poor Miss Ellen, Maria's invalid cousin, who hadn't been out of the house for years, should have read in the papers at what hotel the real Lord Pollypod stopped, and that he was married, and had guessed this one was a swindler, and had got Thomas Tallman to investigate. And how Miss Maria had known it all when she came home, and had made it up with her old sweetheart, as if there had never been a quarrel. It was like a play; and I say again, I laughed heartily.

"Missus had to pay some of the bills, to be sure, but she had lots of money; and my Miss Maria is happily married to Mr. Tallman." **H. Jarvis.**

Her Adorer: "No, sir, it is not for the sake of your daughter's money I love her; it is on account of her sweet temper and charming manners." Her Father: "If it is not for money you wish to marry, I can let you have my niece; she has a much sweeter temper and no money whatever."

A NEW MAGAZINE.

"The Rapid Review."

Everyone wants to be—*has* to be—up to date nowadays. The man or woman who cannot talk intelligently on whatever subject his or her companions are discussing is the person who soon has no companions. As the Americans put it, he "gets left."

But the point is, that keeping well informed on topical matters takes time, takes trouble, and takes money. Few people have time or money to spare—no one goes to more trouble over anything than he can possibly help.

There is a solution of the difficulty. If you want to be thoroughly well posted up in a subject there is nothing like going to someone who knows all about it and getting him to talk to you for five minutes. He will leave you with a grasp of the whole affair which you could never possibly have attained merely by plodding through dreary yards of newspaper matter.

Why? Because he gives you only the essentials, and puts them clearly.

Now, on February 12th, the publishers of *Short Stories* will produce the first number of a new sixpenny magazine, The Rapid Review, which, like the well-informed friend, will give the essentials of things—of all matters of topical interest—and will give them clearly, concisely, and entertainingly.

Politics, literature, science, art, women's work and interests, country life—all these things will be found in The Rapid Review, treated in a style which will save time, money, and trouble, and which will enable you to talk intelligently on all of them.

Bright extracts will be given from all the newest books; the magazines, reviews, and periodicals "just out"—in fact, when you have read The Rapid Review you will have read all the current literature, and will know what magazines and books to buy and what not to waste money on.

Women will find a special interest in this new magazine. In the feature entitled "Women's Work and Interest" the sayings, writings, and achievements of women all the world over will be brightly chronicled, keeping women in complete and direct touch with their sisters and their sisters' advancement.

Finally, in political troubles and foreign "complications," The Rapid Review will make a point of explaining how things began, and then will put you right up to date in them.

In exactly the same fashion—the giving of bright extracts and concise essentials—will be treated the drama, music, art, country life, scientific work—everything. The Rapid Review is, in fact, a magazine which no one can possibly afford to miss.

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.
The Writing in the Diary.

MARCELLA had not long been back in durance vile at the Court before she noticed a subtle something in the atmosphere of her father's home. Life went on just the same, with a difference, but a difference so slight, so as to be perceptible only to the most keenly sensitive nature.

Sir Cyprian was suave, courteous, and attentive as usual, but beneath the velvet glove of his polished manners Marcella knew that there lay ready for an emergency the iron hand Sir Cyprian knew so well how to wield. She had once before been brought face to face with it.

Edward Day had left the Court, and also the kindly Dr. Slade whom Marcella had liked so much; so life dragged on drearily, while she waited patiently for news of Philip Nullius.

His month's holiday was nearly over, and yet not one line had come from him—not a sign by which she might comfort herself that he was well and thinking of her.

Only one ray of comfort had she in all her secret doubts and fears. It came from her aunt, Lady Violet, who had contrived to send her a letter under cover to her maid. It had assured her of her aunt's love and devotion, and that Mr. Johnson had gone in search of her lover to bring him back in safety.

The letter had concluded with the expression of Lady Violet's constant thought and prayers for her darling's future happiness. The postscript rather puzzled her. It was: "Be careful not to wilfully annoy your father, and don't go for long rambles without your maid. Keep her always near you, wherever you are; don't be *alone* anywhere."

She was puzzling over the postscript one morning while turning the leaves of some book she had brought up from an old, disused cupboard. She had fancied that one or two might prove interesting. She picked up a small, old-fashioned volume, something like the neat diaries of thirty years ago; it had once had a lock and key, but the lock had long since been broken off.

She opened it curiously. The pages were stained, and a faint, old-world perfume emanated from its musty binding.

On the fly leaf was written in a dainty, effeminate hand, the words "Laura Rust."

"My mother!" Marcella murmured with a tremor in her voice. "My dear, dead mother!"

She touched the book with reverent fingers. Her girlish thoughts had always dwelt tenderly on the unknown mother.

The little jottings of every-day life were instinct with a new meaning and interest for her. They revealed the workings of a simple mind, satisfied with the solid gifts the gods gave her.

One pencilled line appealed to her passionately. It was:

"March 12th. Baby girl born. Life will begin anew for me in living for her."

"Mother—mother!" she murmured brokenly. "Had you only lived now!"

Then on through the pages of fresh maternal utterances, she came upon a line that puzzled her. It was: "Hope is killed in me—only shame and horror live! God spare my darling girl from my sorrow—shield her from learning what I have learnt. I feel at times that I cannot bear it—my brain burns and I can't think."

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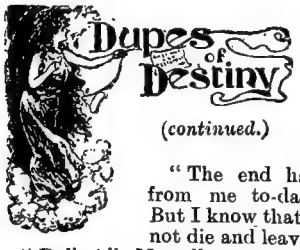

(*continued.*)

Wonderingly and fearfully, Marcella turned the pages a little further, and came upon the last notes in the diary.

As she read it, she uttered a cry of astonishment. It was:

"The end has come. They took baby from me to-day. They say she is dead. But I know that must be false. Dolly could not die and leave me!"

"Dolly!" Marcella exclaimed. "I must have had a sister then! And I was never told—oh, how cruel—how cruel! My poor, dear, sorrowful little mother!"

A sudden thought struck her. She had heard someone else speak of a child called "Dolly." Who was it?

Why—as a flash of memory returned to her—the woman in the forbidden corridor spoke of a baby called "Dolly"! How strange! She had forgotten that half-witted, gentle creature, but now all returned to her with a vivid sense of regret.

She sprang to her feet with an exclamation. As she did so there was a sound at the door, and before she could either say "Come in" or "Who's there?" it was flung open and Sir Cyprian stood on the threshold, his usually serene blue eyes fixed upon her with an expression of malicious hate.

And behind him came a tall, lean-faced man, who looked at her with a peculiar intentness that made her shrink instinctively from him.

Marcella looked in amazement from her father to the stranger with the glittering, dark eyes, whose gaze never left her face.

"Did you want me, father?" she asked slowly. "I could have joined you in the drawing-room had you sent for me; but I will go now, if you will take—your friend," with a slight emphasis on the word—"downstairs. This is hardly the place in which to receive visitors."

Sir Cyprian closed the door behind the man who had accompanied him, and it struck Marcella that something must have gone wrong with the latch, for it gave a little "click," as though the key had been turned.

"Let me introduce my friend, Dr. Winter, Marcella," her father said, ignoring her speech, and fixing his blue eyes, now so strangely cold, upon her white face. Since that day when he had brought her back to the Court, he had taken little trouble to conceal his dislike of her, even his voice, though always perfectly courteous, was chilly when he was obliged to speak to her.

Marcella bowed coldly. The face of the man with the bull-dog jaw and sinister eyes made a slight shiver run through her. She wondered to what this strange, unceremonious visit was the prelude.

"I am pleased to make Miss Rust's acquaintance," Dr. Winter said in an oily voice, which, coming from such a coarsely-built man caused Marcella to look at him in astonishment. Which was natural, she wondered, the voice or the cruel, greedy eyes?

"You have not been looking very well lately, my dear," Sir Cyprian went on, "and I thought it my duty to see a medical man about you."

"Yes," added Dr. Winter unctuously. "I can see at a glance that Miss Rust is, what shall we say—unstrung and inclined to be hysterical."

Marcella flushed angrily.

"I am perfectly well, thank you," she said curtly; "and, father," turning to Sir Cyprian, "had you desired to consult a doctor about me, I would prefer that you had asked my old friend Dr. Baxter, who has seen me before. I hate strangers."

Dr. Winter smiled, and his smile was even more oily than his voice.

"Quite so, my dear Miss Rust," he murmured, "we all hate strangers sometimes, especially when we think they will discover too much about our ailments. But I will try to take Dr. Baxter's place in your estimation."

Marcella's big brown eyes flashed haughtily as she looked at the ill-bred man before her.

"That would be impossible," she retorted. "Dr. Baxter happens to be a gentleman."

Instead of replying instantly to her, Dr. Winter looked at Sir Cyprian with a swift, interrogatory glance. His face was just a little more pasty in colour, and his beady eyes sparkled ominously.

"Come, Marcella, don't be foolish," her father interrupted quickly. "Dr. Winter is only willing to be your friend. You must not thwart him because he is not so old as Dr. Baxter. I wished for the best medical advice about you, and sent to London for it; these country doctors are no authority on illnesses like that with which you are threatened."

A little frightened at the serious tone in which her father addressed her, and somewhat ashamed of her snub, which had been received so silently, Marcella said gently:

"I am sorry I was annoyed, but you know I dislike a fuss made about my health. I am perfectly well, really; you must not think that because I don't grow rosy faced and fat that there is anything the matter with me."

Dr. Winter put out his hand. It was a white, dimpled hand, and the filbert nails were polished and well trimmed. Marcella's eyes rested on them thoughtfully.

"Let me feel your pulse, my dear," he said gently. "I am of another opinion concerning your health; but we will soon see which of us is in the right."

She drew forward the hand that had remained concealed behind her back. It still held the little diary belonging to that dead mother, whose story had touched her so keenly.

Sir Cyprian's eyes had followed her movements, and as they fell upon the book clasped in her hand his face grew suddenly ashen, and a terrified expression leapt into his blue eyes.

"Where did you get that?" he said sharply. "Give it to me!"

Marcella looked at him, startled by the sudden tone of anger in his voice.

"It is an old diary of my mother's," she faltered. "I was reading about the death of my little sister Dolly. You never told me that I had had a sister, father!" she said, reproachfully.

"Give me that book and don't talk nonsense," he answered in a shaky voice.

Something in the way he spoke made Marcella draw back her outstretched hand.

"Then since I am talking nonsense, there is no necessity for me to give up my mother's diary," she retorted. "It is mine. You could not have loved her. I have read of her sorrow between the lines she jotted down at odd intervals. My poor mother was unhappy. I know it—I feel it."

Sir Cyprian bit his lip, but the fleeting expression of terror had left his face—only his upper lip quivered.

"I don't understand, my dear child, what you are talking about," he said slowly. "That diary was a constant amusement to your mother. She used to romance in it—as you are now doing about it. Again I must request you to give it to me."

Still Marcella hesitated.

"Please let me keep it," she said in a low voice, conscious that the twinkling eyes of Dr. Winter had closely observed each gesture. "I, at least, recognise my mother's sorrow; it will be the only possession of hers that I have."

A steely look flickered in Sir Cyprian's eyes at her opposition.

"Then you don't believe me—your father?" he said coldly.

An idea suddenly seized Marcella, and she acted on it, without considering the wisdom of such a proceeding.

"I will give it to you if you promise to take me to Dolly's grave," she said quickly. "I see she died here at the Court, the diary says so, and I at least have the right to visit my own sister's grave."

Sir Cyprian was silent, then he turned to the man by his side, whose glittering eyes had never left Marcella's white, excited face.

"You hear her," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

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"This is the way she goes on whenever anyone contradicts her or wishes her to do anything she herself does not desire. She continually worries me with these outbursts. I see she is now on the verge of one."

Marcella looked at them in surprise. She was flushed, and still angry at what she guessed instinctively to be her father's denial concerning that dear mother's sorrow, and the existence of the sister of whom she had never before heard.

Dr. Winter smiled gently. "Yes, yes," he said in a pitying tone. "I see that you have sent for me in time, Sir Cyprian. They always behave in this passionate way when opposed, and it is the usual thing for them to have hallucinations and imagine that something is being concealed."

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

"That Way Madness Lies!"

Marcella listened to him in amazement. The audacity of speaking *at* her, as though she were not capable of appreciating a personal appeal, was insupportable to her proud, independent nature.

She turned to her father suddenly.

"Why do you permit that man to speak of your daughter in that way?" she demanded hotly. "Surely you will at least protect me from being insulted?"

A slow smile flickered in Sir Cyprian's eyes as he said softly:

"Dr. Winter is quite right, Marcella; you need careful nursing and guarding from all excitement; you must be a good girl, and obey those who are in authority over you. I am afraid your temper grows more and more uncontrollable every day, and the fact of your jumping to such wild conclusions about your mother proves that, as Dr. Winter says, you are suffering from a form of hallucination."

Marcella listened to him in silence, her eyes searching his face for some meaning he had not put into words. As she watched him she remembered the postcript at the bottom of Lady Violet's letter, bidding her beware of letting herself be thrown into a temper by anything that was said to her!

Had her aunt anticipated that she would be in danger of losing her temper if provoked, she wondered; and then another thought confronted her—had her father purposely brought this rude, ill-bred stranger into the house, with the object of rousing that high-spirited temper he knew her to possess?

She drew in her breath sharply as the idea took firm hold upon her, and she realised that by speaking as she had intended, she would only be playing into the hands of the man whom she had begun to fear more than anyone on earth. The man who was her father, and natural protector, but at whose very touch she recoiled as by instinct!

She raised her head, and, instead of the passion of invective and scorn Sir Cyprian and the Doctor had expected, said with a slight smile:

"Of course you know best, father. I don't feel at all ill though, and as for hallucinations, of which Dr. Winter fancies me possessed, I am afraid he is labouring under one himself in imagining me so afflicted. Perhaps, now that he has seen me, you will allow me to leave the room," she added calmly, "and if Dr. Winter is staying at the Court he will be able to watch my convalescence under his attention. I am sure he considers me an interesting case."

The delicate irony in her voice, and the steady dignity in her intelligent brown eyes, caused a dark red flush to mantle the cheeks of both men.

They were for the moment nonplussed by the sudden change in her manner and speech, having congratulated themselves upon the ingenuity with which they had roused the girl's warm blood and impulsive nature to passionate revolt and reckless denunciation of themselves.

An ugly look stole into Dr. Winter's narrow eyes as he took in the strength and pluck of the girl who could pit her wit against their cunning.

"I think it will be better if you came to a sanatorium,

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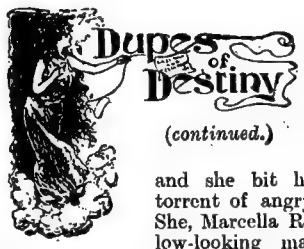

(*continued.*)

Miss Rust," he said slowly. "You then would receive every attention, and a more speedy cure would be effected — mental cases always require special care."

Marcella's eyes flashed, and she bit her lips to conceal the hot torrent of angry words that rose to them. She, Marcella Rust, had been described by a low-looking man as "a mental case!" What would Lady Violet and Philip say to such a slander? At the thought of those two she loved best, she kept down her wrath, and answered sweetly:

"It is most kind of you to suggest it, Dr. Winter, but although I am sure I should, as you say, receive every attention at your hands, I prefer to stay at the Court, where, if I require it, I will ask you to attend to me."

"Come, no more nonsense of this kind, Marcella," Sir Cyprian broke in harshly, after a quick exchange of glances with Dr. Winter, who had shrugged his shoulders expressively. "What is being done is entirely for your own good. I won't have this foolish opposition—or you will regret making an enemy of me."

She looked at him coolly. "An enemy, father! Well, I am not sure that you are not right—you were also my mother's enemy!"

Sir Cyprian started as though a hand had struck him in the face, and looked at her with a white heat of passion in his eyes. Heedless of the presence of another man in the room, he strode quickly up to her, and grasped her wrist savagely.

"You dare to speak like that to me!" he hissed. "Be careful, Miss Marcella—I have let you off easily in the past—but don't go too far. In fighting me, you little fool, you dig a grave for others."

He let her go, and flung her from him. His breath was rising in short, quick gasps to his lips, and his face was livid. Marcella looked at him curiously. She did not feel the bruise on her soft, white wrist; she was too interested in watching the ungovernable rage of a man who had hitherto been the outward semblance of dignity and good breeding.

As though regretting his outburst, Sir Cyprian gave a little metallic laugh, and raised a trembling hand to his moustache.

"So you see, Marcella, it will be better for you to obey me, and do as I wish. Dr. Winter here will be your medical man, and in his care—" he paused, and a strange smile flickered across his mouth.

Dr. Winter moved closer to the shrinking girl. He also was smiling, and the expression in his eyes made Marcella's blood run cold; it was as though a creeping, slimy reptile had trailed across her hand.

"Don't touch me," she said in a loud, clear voice. "If you choose to stay here I cannot stop you—but I have at least the control of my own wishes, and I will not allow you to come near me. You hear!"

Sir Cyprian flashed a look of hate at her, as he said slowly: "I suppose your precious Aunt Violet has encouraged you to oppose me, but let me inform you, my dear child, that unless you obey my orders, and instantly do what you are told, I can make it very uncomfortable for Lady Violet.

"A certain little secret of hers is in my possession, and if you give me any further trouble, I shall consider myself free to reveal what I know, and you will have the satisfaction of feeling that it was your fault that your aunt is cut by Society. So unless you obey Dr. Winter and consent to go to a sanatorium for your health, which is all that is asked of you, I shall speak what I know."

Marcella, divided between her love for her aunt and her loathing for the man into whose care her father wished to place her, was silent.

The two men watched her curiously. How would she decide?

She opened her mouth to speak, when there came a loud, imperative knocking at the door, and the handle was turned as though whoever was outside had an urgent reason for desiring to enter.

"Who's that?" Sir Cyprian said angrily.

And to Marcella's surprise and delight she heard the voice of her own maid say:

"A telegram for Sir Cyprian—reply prepaid."

Sir Cyprian hesitated—the woman had evidently not recognised his voice. "Slip it under the door," he said, after a pause. "I will see Sir Cyprian gets it."

"But the master is in here," the woman continued, as though puzzled by the order. "I was told that he and a gentleman had come down this passage."

Marcella seized her chance. It would be awful if she heard her faithful maid going back, leaving her to the tender mercy of she knew not what.

"It's all right, Jane," she called, wrenching away the hand her father had suddenly tried to force across her mouth. "Sir Cyprian is here with his friend and myself; he will open the door, and you can then give him the telegram."

Livid with rage and baffled design, Sir Cyprian unlocked the door and flung it open.

Marcella sprang towards Jane with a hysterical laugh "Wait for me, Jane. I have finished my hunt among the old books—I—" and she shivered, "I shall not come here again."

The words on her lips trailed into a murmur as a hoarse cry from Sir Cyprian made her turn sharply to glance at him. His face was ashen, and in his eyes, which were fixed upon the orange-tinted telegraph form in his hands, was an evil look that changed the expression of his face into that of a satyr.

Then realising suddenly that the two women were staring at him curiously, he pulled himself together, and turning to the man by his side, he whispered a few words in a hurried undertone, that also had the effect of making the sickly cheeks of the doctor a yet more unhealthy hue.

Marcella sprang forward. Her father's face frightened her.

"Aunt Violet!" she gasped. "Is that telegram from her?"

Sir Cyprian looked at her as one in a dream, then with a harsh laugh he brushed past her and went quickly out of the room, followed by Dr. Winter.

Marcella stood motionless until the sound of their steps died away down the passage, then she turned to the servant, who had been looking at the unusual scene with puzzled eyes. She had been Marcella's maid for some time, and was devoted heart and soul to her young mistress.

"Tell me, Jane," and Marcella grasped the woman's arm feverishly. "Do you think that I am in any danger of going—mad?"

"Mad, miss? Why, whatever put such an idea in your head?" And Jane glanced anxiously at the tall, beautiful girl, whose face was full of fire and life.

"I don't know," Marcella answered evasively, "but I wondered whether I struck others as being the sort of person who would be likely to have hallucinations—led away by their own imaginations, you know," she explained.

"Lor' miss, what an idea to get into your head," the woman said soothingly. "There's not much like that the matter with you, though they do say"—and she paused abruptly, colouring hotly, as though conscious of having said something she could not explain.

"What do 'they' say?" Marcella demanded, with whitening lips. "You must tell me, Jane, now; if you are my friend, keep nothing from me that I should know."

"Well, miss, they do say," began the woman slowly and with evident hesitation, "that—that a relation of Sir Cyprian's did once die mad, but it was a sudden shock that brought it on, it not being inherited—so you must not think of such things, miss," she concluded, "they don't need to trouble you."

Marcella was silent. Her maid's words had frightened her more than she dared say. Suppose then that a specialist

(Continued on page 190.)

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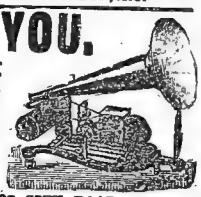

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(continued.)

like that rough-looking man, Dr. Winter, had recognised the fateful signs of that unknown relative's disease. She would be debarred from ever becoming the wife of the man she loved. She prayed that it might not be the case, for then the gates of happiness would be closed for ever!

She clutched Jane's arm anxiously. "Jane, you must always stay near me; wherever I go, you must come—you understand," she went on feverishly. "I dare not be alone. I am afraid of—of dreadful things happening that would hurt me—and perhaps others. Promise me, Jane, that you will always keep within calling distance?"

"I promise, miss," the woman murmured soothingly. "Why, here in your own father's house you are safe from everything. Don't worry, miss, I shall always be near you and then there is Lady Violet; she is just wrapped up in you, miss."

Marcella was conscious of a feeling of helplessness. She could not admit to the servant that it was in her father's house that for her the most danger lurked, and while she was surrounded by new perils, her aunt was happy in the knowledge that since Edward Day had left the Court she was free from danger. But she tried to shake off the weight of depression. She must be wary and so behave that in her conduct there could be no loophole for her enemies to seize upon.

"I want you to post a letter for me to-night, Jane," she said, after a pause. "Be very careful of it—it is important, and I do not like trusting it to the post-bag."

When her young mistress was in her own little boudoir that evening, Jane slipped downstairs with a letter in her hand.

"Poor young lady," she murmured. "I didn't like 'er asking all them questions about madness. It gave me quite a turn, it did—I hadn't the heart to tell her it was her own mother as they are saying died mad. And I pray she may never learn it—my dear Miss Marcella."

When she was beyond the gates of the Court, a shadow slipped from behind one of the stone pillars, and followed the figure of the lady's maid some distance, then, cutting across a field, the shadow waited near a rustic bridge that spanned a brook, and over which the pedestrians had to go in order to get into the village of Crawley.

Some little time later a man strolled through the gateway at the Court. He was smiling, and the expression on his face was the reverse of pleasant.

"That gave her a good shock; she will take some time to recover," he muttered. "A cold douche is not always pleasant on a chilly night." Then his hand sought his pocket and remained there.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

On the Eve of a Discovery.

"If anyone, man or woman, who was returning home on board the Australian liner, the *Asia*, about twenty-five years ago, can tell advertiser anything about a woman who died among the third-class passengers, giving birth to a living child, will communicate with 'N.,' 360 Willing a handsome remuneration will be given."

The above advertisement had appeared in several leading dailies with but scant notice. People were too busy to think much about what took place among the steerage passengers a quarter of a century back.

But out of the many thousand pairs of eyes that had glanced casually at the advertisement, one pair had seen it, and, with a start, had traversed mentally the distance of time, and lived again a brief episode on board that Australian liner. Then the owner of the eyes had sat down in a humble little parlour of a shop off the Walworth Road, and painfully and with much thought, had written a note and sent it to "N.," 360 Willing.

That letter was now in the possession of the man who had inserted the advertisement. He was reading it with a cynical smile of triumph on his weak mouth, and held the half sheet of dirty paper between dainty white fingers.

"So my little bait was not dangled in vain," he sneered, lighting a cigarette and pushing away a half-finished cup of coffee. "I must pay a visit to Mrs. Robson, and see what price her valuable information will come to. I shall certainly not pay much any way—I am broke as it is."

It was now a week since Edward Day had been installed in the house of the financier, Caleb J. Johnson, as secretary, and during that time he had not once seen the man who had engaged him.

He had, in consequence, done no work of any sort except to read as much as he could glean from the Gold King's papers concerning the new mine, the "Ruby Duncoran," and his mouth had watered at the thought of so much gold passing through the hands of a man whom he contemptuously described as a "gilded bounder."

Day possessed a very fair knowledge concerning the ways of brokers and the buying and selling of shares, and had made up his mind to gradually obtain good tips from his new employer, and build up a fortune for himself.

Of the deluded chorus girl he had married in a moment of weakness, he thought no more, unless it were to revile the day her fair prettiness had lured him to commit such an error.

"I may as well hunt the old creature up," he muttered. "It probably will not result in my finding out much that is pleasant, but anyway I shall know exactly how I stand. I'm not fool enough to imagine that I shall discover myself to be the heir to a title!" he laughed bitterly. "But in spite of the drawback of birth, I shall so play my cards that I shall succeed where another man would fail.

"I am going to sound this old Johnson rotter and he may find me useful, and then reward me by leaving me half his fortune! It's a nuisance his having married that woman, Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox." And a hard glitter shone in his blue eyes. "I might have had things my own way then. But at anyrate I mean to make Miss Marcella eat humble pie for her scorn, and I fancy her father, Sir Cyprian, is not averse to correcting her himself."

He rose and surveyed himself in the glass over the mantel, with a conscious smile.

"Yes, I am certainly a beggar on horseback just now, but I mean to win the race that I've entered for. That snivelling sky-pilot, Nullius, has been cleverly disposed of in a way that reveals Marcella's father as a prince of resource; and now he is cooling his heels. I fancy that the next time I see Marcella she will have realised that 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' Then"—he laughed softly—"well, then I shall pay back a few old scores."

He arranged the carnation in his button-hole, inspected the cut of his new frock-coat, and smoothed the silk on his tall hat; then satisfied that he could in no way improve upon his appearance, he left the house in Park Lane and strolled into Piccadilly. There he took a hansom, and when the driver heard the address he looked sharply at his fashionable fare as though suspecting a joke.

"A cove like 'im to tell me to drive to the Walworth Road," he muttered. "Life's full of surprises. Anyway it's no business of mine so long as I gets my fare."

When he reached his destination, Edward Day paid the man, who looked at him curiously.

"Shall I wait, sir?"

"No, it's not necessary," he replied, then wending his way carefully through the barrows and crowds of people who thronged the pavements, he came to the address that had been given in the letter he had received.

"Ah, that's it," he murmured. "Mrs. Robson—Ladies' Clothing Bought at Reasonable Prices."

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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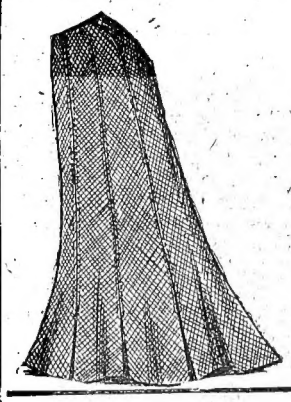

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[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Girl Who Doesn't Like Young Men.

"I CANNOT understand myself," writes "Q." "I see lots of young men, but I find I positively dislike them. On the other hand, I am very interested in men ten years older than myself, and find them much more attentive to me, and more fascinating than boys. What is your opinion of me, for thinking this?"

* * * * *

There are a lot of girls like you, "Q." Not every girl does care for the average young man, just as not every man cares for young girls. It is entirely a matter of temperament. If you like older men, there is no reason why your affections should not be given to one of them. Many girls marry men ten years or more older than themselves, and with very happy results. Certainly, I would not cultivate young men's society, if you dislike them. Besides, there are plenty of other girls who are different, so that we can spare one. It is just as well, though, that there are girls like you, for the sake of the old bachelors alone.

The Strange Young Man.

"RUBY" is puzzled and worried. She is in a confectioner's shop in a large provincial town. Some weeks ago, a young man, evidently a stranger, went in and bought some trifle. On the excuse of looking at other things, he stayed in the shop about twenty minutes, all the time talking to "RUBY," and trying to get intimate with her. As the proprietor was near by, "RUBY" did not dare to allow any familiarity.

* * * * *

Well, in half an hour's time, "RUBY" received a note by post-office messenger, asking her to meet the young man after she left the shop, and have tea with him. "RUBY" went, just out of curiosity, and the two got on very well together. Then the young man said he had to take the next train back to London. Without more than a short word of parting, he left "RUBY," and she has not heard a word of him since. She asks my opinion of the affair. What can the man's intention have been?

* * * * *

I think I can see through the affair, "RUBY." He was evidently a stranger in the town, and in passing the shop took a fancy to you. Just by way of amusment, I suppose, he asked you to meet him. I don't imagine he had any intentions, serious or otherwise, beyond a little harmless amusement, or you would certainly have heard from him again. I should forget all about him. But, for all you know, he may turn up again. If he does, let me know what happens. You are not the only girl who has had similar experiences. A man alone in a strange town often likes an hour or so with a chance acquaintance.

An Introduction Problem.

"I KNOW a young man by sight," writes "Muriel," "whom I should very much like to know, and I am of the opinion that he would also like to know me. You have often advised people to try and get introduced to each other by the aid of mutual friends. Now, although I first saw this young man some good time ago, since then we have come no nearer to an acquaintance. Do you think I should make the necessary overtures to get introduced, or leave it to him?

* * * * *

The latter course is, by all means, the correct one. If he is really attracted to you he will have more resources for securing an introduction to you than you to him, and, further, it is for him to make the overtures, not you. You had better wait and see whether he makes any attempts to know you, and if not, you may be sure that his feelings towards you are not so active as you imagine them to be.

Misplaced Affection.

IT seems that "Q:" has an exact opposite in "NETTY." Here is her dilemma: "I am twenty-five, but madly in love with a boy of eighteen. Of course marriage is out of the question. He returns my love, and is devoted to me. Neither of us has any means."

* * * * *

I understand your feelings, but you must control them. It is quite wrong for you to go on with such an affair, as nothing can come of it. And, later on, the boy's views are sure to alter. I cannot advise you in such a matter. It is for yourself to act as you should do, and control yourself from feelings which can only result in unhappiness.

A Changed Lover.

"RITA."—I am sorry your love affair has turned out so badly. There seems no explanation of the young man's conduct, beyond that, I fear, he has grown tired of you. From the remarks you quote, I suppose he has been hearing from other men advice against marriage and engagement, and has for a while decided to remain a bachelor. At the same time, he evidently does not wish to hurt your feelings by confessing it to you. I should wait a while and see if he alters in any way. After a time he may repent, and come back to you.

The Old Love Returns.

HERE is another phase of the "old lover" question: "MARY" and her sweetheart had quarrelled and parted three years ago. They had been very fond of each other, but the man complained that "MARY" was too sentimental for him, and did not think they would be happy together. The other day they met again. To all appearances, the old passion came back. The man was his old self, and paid "MARY" the same attentions as he used to do, and they talked of love as before.

* * * * *

Then they parted, arranging to see each other again. After a week or so, no letter came from the man. "MARY" wrote to remind him of their arrangement to meet. Again she got no answer. Then she met him in the street, and he simply raised his hat and passed on. Do I advise "MARY" to give up any hopes of a revival of the affair?

* * * * *

I do advise that. He clearly does not wish the affair to be revived. He said he found you too sentimental in the old days. Well, though on the day you met he appeared to love you as before, it is clear that on thinking the matter over he returned to his old opinion. Drop him, "MARY," as he is unprofitable to you.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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